MOVING HOMEBOUND SENIORS FROM ISOLATION INTO INTEGRATION INTO CHURCH LIFE THROUGH DISCIPLESHIP PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

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The project context is Berean Seventh-day Adventist Church. In their final years, many Seniors find themselves in confinement. I have a burden to aid Seniors in getting back involved in the church's mission. Homebound Senior Adults are in many ways isolated from discipleship opportunities within their congregations, as they age. However, not all can contribute more than their finances to the church. They need opportunities to use their God-given gifts through discipleship practices. I want to assist Homebound Senior Adults and congregations in discovering ways to move Seniors from isolation to integration into church life through discipleship opportunities.

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I am extremely grateful that God has brought me to the conclusion of this trying doctoral journey. It was only by the grace of God that I was able to cross the finish line. I regret that my birth parents did not live to witness their only child awarded his Doctor of Ministry Degree. I appreciate the example they left for me, as they were the first in their families to attend college. I am honored to be the first on both sides of the family to receive a doctorate.

Thank you to my United Theological Seminary mentors: Dr. Van Ross, Dr. Lillian Smith, Dr. Rudy Rasmus, and Dr. Pauline Buish, for your guidance and patience with an older student. I appreciated your encouragement and prayers when I wanted to give up.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation work to my dear and closest friend, Quetah Sackie-Osborne. Thank you for all the sacrifices you have made over the last thirty years. I never would have made it without your love, prayers, and your cheering me on.

I also dedicate this project to my children: Queanna, Charles IV. (Peris), and Henry (Amanda). Each of you has been an encouragement through this journey.

I dedicate this work to my parents: Charles Jr., Myrtle, Joseph, and Marcia, who have always seen the best in me. During this process, my birth mother was laid to rest. I am so grateful to my bonus mother, who has been there for me from the very beginning.

I dedicate this work to the St. Louis Berean, Beacon of Hope, Denver Park Hill, and Fairhaven Seventh-day Adventist Churches. They both reminded me that no Older Adult must be left behind. They modeled for me how critical it is to assist and encourage our members to remain active.

I dedicate this work to the former Administrative Team of The Central States Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church: Elder Roger A. Bernard, Elder Tonya Anderson, and Elder Cryton Josiah. When I expressed my desire to continue my education, you did all that you could to assist me in completing the process.

I dedicate this project to the Administrative Team of The Allegheny West Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. You not only encouraged me but spoke life into my project.

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INTRODUCTION

All Homebound Seniors are not like my late ninety-year-old mother, living with us during the final years of her life. She was a very active and independent woman. On September 16, 2020, she suffered two major medical events. The stroke and heart attack physically robbed Mom of much of her independence. Yet she has made it very clear that she wanted to age in her own home. One of the ways that she aided in her rehabilitation was through crocheting. Over six months, Mom created at least ten Afghan blankets, which she has gifted to members of the Berean Seventh-day Adventist Church Family. This activity was her way of remaining useful. However, this is not the testimony of all Homebound Seniors. None of them are motivated to reinvent themselves or find ways to stay active. Many of them are not physically able to continue to contribute to the life of the church. Yet, some still have something to offer in service. I want to aid those who can still contribute to ministry and their congregations, and to assist in moving these individuals from isolation to usefulness.

To begin, I chose Psalm Chapter Seventy-One to examine in my Biblical Foundations, Chapter Two. Although scholars are divided on its authorship, based on the research I present in this chapter, I support those who view David as its author. David seems to be struggling with two enemies: one physical and the other emotional. These two enemies are interconnected. While he is battling the physical one, he is also wrestling with his apparent fear of separation from God. Just as David fears being isolated in his

later years, so do Homebound Seniors. There is no evidence that anyone came to the King's aid, but the church certainly has an opportunity to step up and assist Homebound Seniors.

King David does not want to be forced into early retirement. He may no longer be able to go out to war anymore. He may not be able to play his harp like he used to. Yet, David still believes that he has something to offer to the next generation. Jessie's son is not quite washed up yet. He wants to testify about the power of the Lord. He desires to share what can happen when one depends upon God, as one relies on a sling and a stone. The next generation needs to know that God can deliver them from internal and external enemies. The same God who has fought David's battles will fight their battles, too. Like David, Homebound Seniors do not want God to abandon them. Neither do they want the church nor their community to forsake them. They need to be needed.

More than 500 years ago, the world's attention was drawn to a fatal disease outbreak called the bubonic plague. On August 2, 1527, the plague was detected in Wittenberg, Germany, home to the University of Wittenberg. The Reformer Martin Luther was assigned to pastor and teach in this community. Within a few days of the plague's arrival, Dr. Luther and his colleagues were directed to relocate to Jena. Luther chose to disobey the evacuation order and to minister in place. Prior to the plagues reaching Germany, Luther received a letter from a group of concerned clergymen. Luther's Letter was the basis for Chapter Three, Historical Foundations. The ministers sought counsel on whether Christians should remain in their plague-infested city or save their lives by escaping. Luther strongly encouraged the ministers to stay in place and

minister to their parishioners. Just as the ministers had an obligation to tend to their sheep, the church has a responsibility to minister to my Homebound Seniors.

Luther's Letter reminded me that all human life is valuable, regardless of color, social standing, disease, or age. Secondly, although a person is homebound, we can't fall into an out-of-sight, out-of-mind attitude. Thirdly, being of service comes with risk. For Luther's audience, the risks were being misunderstood and being infected by the plague. For those ministering to Homebound Seniors, there is a danger of being accused of serving to get something from them. There will always be challenges when we are being of service. As Luther encouraged the ministers to find a way to minister, the church must also find a way to address the needs of Homebound Seniors, who are looking to serve.

The aging process will affect all of us sooner or later. How we view it will determine how we will cope with it and how we view others who are journeying through it. Therefore, we should adopt a theology that influences our view of aging. According to "A Theology of Aging," "A 'theology of aging' is an understanding of aging in the light of belief in God."[1] This is the view that I have chosen. God's view of aging was the foundation for my Theological Foundations Chapter.

In Chapter Four, at least four theological themes emerged from the Bible regarding aging. All human lives are valuable to God. Sin, sex, social status, health, or age can change how God feels about us. Next, aging is a blessing from God. Those who honor their parents were promised a long life. Yet the challenges associated with ageing make it difficult to embrace aging at times. Thirdly, humans have a responsibility to love their neighbors. Fourthly, seniors still have something to contribute. One of my mentors passed away at the beginning of 2022 from several ailments. Even though he was

[1] Canon Stephen Ames, "Finding The Way: A Theology of Aging," *Benetas* (April 2012): 4.

homebound, Pastor J. Richard Ellis did not let it keep him from ministering. His phone was his instrument for serving others. Elder Ellis prayed and encouraged many members from his home. His ministry allowed him to remain useful and valuable. This prolonged his life. The lives of other Homebound Seniors who are mentally active could also be extended if we can aid them in being useful.

Finally, Chapter Five, Interdisciplinary Foundations, led me to research aging through the Sociology of Aging. This phrase means that the ageing process is affected by "biological, psychological, and social" factors.[2] Within the Sociology of Aging there are three theories: disengagement, activity, and conflict. The activity theory says, "Older people benefit themselves and their society if they continue to be active."[3]

Within my own family, I have witnessed the importance of seniors remaining active. My mother-in-love is a poster child for aging successfully. Sitting still is not in her vocabulary. After retiring from teaching in 2010, Mom relocated back to her Columbus, Ohio, home. She continued teaching during her retirement. Someone suggested that it was time for Mom to slow down, and she responded, "I can't, I have too much to do!" Mom thinks young, acts young, and interacts with young people. She is determined to maintain an active lifestyle.

On the other hand, there was my Uncle Willie. He was a hardworking man, and there were times when he worked more than one job to care for his family. After his grandchildren had grown up and his wife had passed away, he seemed to have given up.

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[2] Sociology Guide, "A Student's Guide To Sociology," Sociologyguide.com, https://www.sociologyguide.com/ageing/index.php.

[3] Steve Barkan, "Sociology: Understanding and Changing the Social World," in *Biological and Psychological Aspects of Aging* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2010), 12.5.

He lost interest in repairing automobiles and barbecuing. It was not long before he was diagnosed with Dementia, and within a few years, he passed away.

My doctoral project focuses on a subgroup of older adults: Homebound Senior Adults. These individuals are confined to their homes for various reasons, but they still have something to offer to their local congregation.

> Social isolation and its health consequences are major concerns in the elderly population (Gray 2009; Kobayashi et al. 2009). As adults transition to old age, they retire from socially engaging work roles, their children grow up and move away, and health conditions increasingly limit social activities, create significant caregiving responsibilities, and enhance the probability of spousal loss.[4]

Although they may no longer be physically active, their minds are active. By keeping them active in some form of ministry, we can help them avoid isolation from the Berean Church Family. "We are isolated like never before."[5] The issue of loneliness and isolation has reached such a point that in May 2023, the United States Surgeon General identified it as an epidemic.

> Loneliness is far more than just a bad feeling—it harms both individual and societal health. It is associated with a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety, and premature death. The mortality impact of being socially disconnected is similar to that caused by smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day,[4] and even greater than that associated with obesity and physical inactivity. And the harmful consequences of a society that lacks social connection can be felt in our schools, workplaces, and civic organizations, where performance, productivity, and engagement are diminished.[6]

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[4] Richard A. Settersten, Jr., and Jacqueline L. Angel, eds., *Handbook of Sociology of Aging* (New York, NY: Springer, 2011), 534.

[5] Tesia Mallory, "New Frontier In Faith: Transforming Prayer In The Digital Age," Panel discussion at United Theological Seminary, August 24, 2023.

[6] Vivck Murthy, "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation 2023 The U. S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community," Washington, D.C.: Office of The U.S. Surgeon General, May 2023, 4.

H. Michael points out that "Isolation is the antithesis of contentment. Getting involved in the world is one of the best ways to reduce isolation."[7] "Houses of worship and other religious institutions play an essential role in promoting social connectedness, mutual aid, and community building."[8] The power of older adults' involvement is illustrated in A. Martinez's interview with Dan Buettner. Buettner researched areas of the world where people lived to be older than one hundred years of age. These areas were called blue zones. Buettner was asked how young people who were around these older adults viewed them.

> First of all, in America, where we tend to celebrate youth-just open a magazine and look at the ads-in blue zones, they celebrate age. The older you are, the more revered you are. You know, I remember going up to Sardinia, and instead of seeing, like, the swimsuit model of the month calendar, it was the centenarian of the month calendar. It is a resource. Older people are seen as a resource. Older people are seen as a resource. Their talents are harnessed, and they have this feeling like they matter. And I believe part of their longevity is due to this sort of realization that they know their lives are useful, and they're expected to get up and help.[9]

Mother Teresa was correct when she challenged us to, "Let us touch the dying, the poor, the lonely and the unwanted according to the graces we have received and let us not be ashamed or slow to do the humble work."[10]

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[7] H. Michael Zal, *A Psychiatrist's Guide to Successful Retirement and Aging: Coping with Change* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2016), 169.

[8] E. J. Dionne, Jr., "We Need a Truce in Our Wars over Religion. Here's a Glimmer of Hope," *The Washington Post*, September 10, 2023.

[9] A. Martinez, "Netflix Series Travels the World's 'Blue Zones' Where Longevity Rules," NPR, 1-18, https://www.npr.org/2023/09/14/1199429444/ netflix- series-travels-the-worlds-blue-zones-where-longevity-rules.

[10] Rudy Rasmus, *Touch: Pressing Against the Wounds of a Broken World* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 51.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

While sitting at home one afternoon, my telephone ranged. “Hello Pastor Osborne! This is Sister R. How are you doing?” I responded, “I am doing fine Sister R. How are you doing?” She said, “I am doing alright. Pastor, would you do me a favor?” “Yes, ma’am! What can I do for you?” She made the following request, “Would you please ask the church family to call and check on me?” “Yes, I will certainly do that!” I honored her request. In our monthly Church Board Meeting, I shared the request of this dear Homebound Saint. Less than two years later, this dear saint passed away.

My heart began to ache. I would indeed visit Sister R. from time to time, but that just was not enough. She was crying out for fellowship from other members of her church family. This senior was expressing the fact that she was lonely and wanted to be connected to her church. Her illness was separating her from worshiping and connecting with The Berean Seventh-day Adventist Church. This dear sister is not the only one who is struggling with being isolated from her church family. We all know that people are living longer than ever before. Many of them are still very active in the twilight years of their lives. They are driving, exercising, marrying, shopping, studying, traveling, volunteering, working, etc. Yet, pastoring an aging congregation means that annually, a new group of individuals are joining the ranks of the seniors who are homebound.

> However, aging is related to a number of factors that have a detrimental effect on the quality of life. These include declining health (Boardman, 2004; Kola & Kosberg, 1981; Stones & Kozma, 1984), loss of friends and family members (Glantz, 1981; Stones & Kozma, 1984), employment and financial problems (Eckenrode, 1984; Pearlin & Radabaugh, 1976), alienation from the larger society (Frytak, Harley, & Finch, 2003; Pearlin, 1983; Pearlin, Schieman, Fazio, & Meersman, 2005), and loneliness (Brown & Chiang, 1983; Schonfeld & Dupree, 1991; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1996; Victor & Scarf, 2005). As a consequence, some elderly adults experience unacceptable reductions of life satisfaction. Bickerstaff, Grasser, and McCabe (2003) wrote: Some elderly persons seem to cope with inevitable changes of later life with a spirit of acceptance ... Unfortunately, losses of later life can prove to be overwhelming for many older adults.[1]

Is there anything that can be done to help homebound seniors remain connected to their church? The problem is that homebound seniors are, in many ways, isolated from discipleship opportunities. The hypothesis for this research project is to move homebound senior adults from being isolated from their church to being involved by integrating them through discipleship opportunities.

Context

Five years ago, the Central States Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Executive Committee voted to transfer my family from the sunny mountains of Denver, Colorado, to the urban Midwest City of St. Louis, Missouri. The skyline of the city is decorated with the St. Louis Arch Monument, which was built as a symbol of Thomas Jefferson's vision of the westward expansion of the United States.[2] For many, the city of St. Louis separates the northern and southern portions of the United States. Reaching St. Louis,

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[1] I. Roy Hunter and Mark C. Gillen, "Stress Coping Mechanisms in Elderly Adults: An Initial Study of Recreational and Other Coping Behaviors in Nursing Home Patients," *Adultspan Journal* 8, no. 1 (2009): 43, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A196533388/AONE?u=upl1179&sid=AONE&xid=b18b1529.

[2] Gateway Authors, "Experience The Gateway Arch," Gateway Arch, https://www.gatewayarch.com/experience/.

Missouri, gave hope to those who had suffered discrimination in the South. The sad reality is that the residents of St. Louis continue to experience racism today.

Few cities have contributed more to the sports industry than St. Louis. Its sports teams have earned championship trophies in baseball, football, and hockey. The city is also the birthplace of the Spinks Family. Michael and Leon are the only brothers who earned the Heavyweight Boxing Championship.

The city is also a culinary smorgasbord. Although there is a large Chinese presence, almost every type of food is available. The reality television show Welcome to Sweetie Pies is based in St. Louis. The soul food restaurant chain is owned by Ms. Robbie Montgomery, a former backup singer for Ms. Tina Turner.

St. Louis is a very religious town. Although it is historically Catholic, most denominations are represented within the city. You can easily see the influence of Catholicism in the architecture and in the hospital system. Growing up in Houston, Texas, I was influenced by the spirituality of the city. On Sunday Mornings, I would rise and watch a preacher out of St. Louis, who was a singer and played the guitar like B. B. King. The late Dr. Cleophas Robinson became one of my favorite gospel singers. I was so excited when I learned that his church was ten minutes away from mine.

Unfortunately, St. Louis is also known for negative news. On August 9, 2014, eighteen-year-old Michael Brown, Jr., was shot to death in Ferguson, Missouri. Ferguson is in the Northern County of St. Louis. Michael died in a confrontation with Ferguson police officers. This shooting brought attention to an alarming trend of African American males being gunned down by law enforcement officers around the United States of

America. The incident caused many to question what other methods could have been utilized to de-escalate this and numerous other situations.

Our denomination assigned us to the historic Berean Seventh-day Adventist Church on the corner of North Union and Page Boulevard. This congregation has ministered to the West Central End of St. Louis for 117 years. It has been housed in four different buildings in three different locations.[3] Between 1904 and 1953, it was the only Seventh-day Adventist congregation that was addressing the needs of African Americans within the city. Berean has faithfully fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and, at times, housed those in need of shelter. On a monthly basis, they visited those who were incarcerated.

In partnership with our local Adventist Churches, we conducted the Bible Answer's Crusade Radio Program. This ministry has operated for over thirty years. They assisted the audience in developing a clearer understanding of God's Word, as well as learning how to develop a healthier lifestyle. We regret that in 2020, it went off the air.

Our church has been a strong supporter of education. We collaborate with other Adventist Churches to educate children from our congregations and community.[4] Berean has also assisted many in obtaining their GEDs.[5] However, many of those who have given so much in service are no longer actively involved in the church's ministries today. Although they are actively financially supporting the church, they need other avenues to minister.

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[3] Denise Johnson and Regina Whitten, "One Hundred Years … How It All Began," in *Berean SDA Church 100th Anniversary Souvenir and Memory Boo*k (St. Louis, MO: Berean SDA Church, 2004), 22.

[4] Johnson and Whitten, "One Hundred Years," 24-25.

[5] Johnson and Whitten, "One Hundred Years," 28.

As I mentioned earlier, I have been pastoring Berean since January 2016. During this five-year period, I have officiated at least thirty-five funeral services. Twenty-eight of these souls were members of our congregations. Twenty-seven of these funerals were for seniors. Some of them passed away suddenly, while others' health declined with the passing of time. One of our most diligent deacons was killed in the line of duty in a hit-and-run accident. While walking to the church for an Addiction Recovery Ministry Program, his earthly life came to an end. He was a senior who possessed a burden for helping souls with addictions. He was so excited as he shared with me his plans and his research to assist those who wanted to be delivered from their addictions.

As with most African American congregations, the seniors are the church's strongest financial supporters. Their passing leaves not only a void in our hearts but also impacts our income. Although we baptize new souls annually, it has been difficult to keep up with the financial losses to our church body. Yet I thank God for being faithful in supplying our needs.

There are several needs within the church and community. Recently, I have been recognizing an increase in mental health issues. This has been a taboo subject in the African American community. Baylor University conducted a study of 293 parishioners who approached their minister about mental illness. They were told that they had a lack of faith, had a demon, or that there really was not a problem.[6] Throughout the years, situations have occurred, and I assumed that the people were just acting mean. As I age, I am learning that many of these individuals are struggling with some form of mental

[6] Vetta Sanders-Thompson and Jermine Albertine, "Deep, Dark Secret: A Closer Look at Mental Illness in the African American Community," Anonymous Missouri Institute of Mental Health, https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/deep-dark-secret-a-closer-look-at-mental-illness-in-the-african-american-community.

health. For me, the challenge is fourfold. How do I convince someone that they have mental health issues when they believe that the problem is with everyone else? How do I minister to someone who refuses to take their medication? How do I help to remove or reduce the stigma of mental illness? I believe that there must be a change in the way The African American Community and Church views mental illness. This issue not only affects the church, but it also affects the neighborhood where we minister.

Violence is another problem affecting the church and community. The situation is so bad in St. Louis that I rarely watch the news. Most of the time, I read the headlines on the internet. There is not a day that I sit in my church office and do not hear the sirens of emergency vehicles as they rush through the community. During my tenure in St. Louis, there has not been a year when a member of our congregation has not buried someone because of gun violence.

In the early morning of Thanksgiving 2019, one of my member's nephews was shot. The young men were home from college. They were on their way to visit a family member when a stranger pulled up alongside their vehicle and began to shoot at them. These young men nearly lost their lives. To make the situation even worse, it was a case of mistaken identity.

In 2020, I officiated twelve funeral services. Three of these celebrations of life were for African American males. Two of them were between nineteen and twenty-one years of age. They were all fathers. Two of them died due to gun violence. One of these young men could have been my twenty-year-old son, who I committed to the earth. Daily, I am reminded that the murder of African American males is at an epidemic level, in the United States of America.

A third issue that is plaguing the Hammington Heights community is people's ability to earn a living wage. This dilemma has become real to me within the last five years. I have friends who are working long hours and are barely surviving. I know individuals whose shelter is their vehicle. I have seen our neighbors who made their beds on the church's steps. One gentleman shared that he was sleeping in a porta potty, which was temporarily on our church's property. He expressed that he was desperate to be protected from the elements of the city of St. Louis. On another occasion, there was a vehicle that was temporarily parked in the church's parking lot. We soon discovered that there was a homeless woman and her baby who were sleeping in it. They were also seeking protection from the elements.

I am aware that there are many details concerning these individuals that I do not have access to. I also know that some people choose to live outdoors because they do not want to adhere to the guidelines of shelters. Yet, I really wish that I knew exactly how to aid those who are homeless, in their cars, or even in their homes and are not making a living wage.

A fourth predicament is the loneliness that our Homebound Seniors are enduring for numerous reasons. Some of them have been separated from loved ones because of death. Some are separated over financial issues. Some are separated because they do not see eye to eye with their children. Some are separated because their family lives in another area and they have chosen to age in the place that they feel the most comfortable in. Others are cut off from their family because of the 2020 pandemic. This fourth group seems to be the one that the Lord is impressing me to connect with during this time in ministry.

Ministry Journey

What is it that helped to prepare me for this moment in ministry educationally? During the Spring of 1987, I was looking for an opportunity to be involved in some practical form of ministry before graduation. While walking by a bulletin board in the Oakwood College's Religious Complex, I noticed a flier that captured my attention. The Florida Hospital System was offering a summer internship at its main campus in Winter Park, Florida. Florida Hospital is the largest of the Seventh-day Adventist Hospital Systems in the United States. The purpose of this program was to expose junior and senior theology majors from Seventh-day Adventist Colleges to the Clinical Pastoral Education Program. Normally, one student was selected from Southern Adventist College and another from Oakwood College. In 1987, no one applied from Southern, so they selected two students from Oakwood. I was one of those students. Over the next nine-plus weeks, my friend and I were mentored by four hospital chaplains. We were encouraged not only to follow them to their respective areas of responsibility but also to take an active role in various aspects of hospital ministries. For example, one day, I was responsible for leading a group in the psychiatric outpatient unit. On another occasion, I sat in on a substance abuse group session. For several weeks, we attended a Grief Recovery Group sponsored by the hospital. It was also during this nine-week period that I encountered my first AIDS patients. There were four AIDS patients on the floor that were assigned to me. This was a very uncomfortable time for me. There was so much misinformation that was being spread and a lack of knowledge pertaining to the disease. Different than today, AIDS was a sentence of death.

As I reviewed all the areas of hospital ministry that I was exposed to, most of the patients that I served were senior adults. Each of these seniors was facing genuine challenges. Like the Jewish gentleman that I met, who was seventy-nine years of age. He was a kind and Godly man. I never learned what his health issue was, but his beloved wife was also in the hospital at the same time. She was across the hall from him. She had been stricken with a severe stroke. Over the next several weeks, he would sit with her daily and support her. His faith was rewarded. One day, the physical therapist assisted her in walking down the hall. After spending several weeks in the hospital, her family was able to take her back home. Within twenty-four hours of arriving home, she passed away. It seems that she was just waiting to return to her home to take her final breath. This loving husband was about to face the loneliness of being separated from his precious bride. Loneliness is real.

Then there was my friend Charlie, who had checked into the hospital for a heart catheterization. This procedure checks for blockages in a person's heart. This was not his first time having this procedure. He educated me on what the procedure involved. Within forty-eight hours, his life was changed forever. During the procedure, he experienced a severe stroke. No longer was he the animated man that I enjoyed talking with. He was now confined to a wheelchair and unable to articulate clearly. Seniors face isolation because of health issues that separate them from their family members.

There was also the dear woman who was sent to my floor, who was sad. She was a precious grandmother. I was shocked to learn that the reason for her being admitted to the hospital was that she was suffering from depression. Within a few days, she had been

transferred to the outpatient psychiatric unit. After attending several group sessions, I learned about some of the challenges that had caused her to become despondent.

What is it that helped to prepare me for this moment of ministry professionally? During the late 2000s, I was assigned to the Fairhaven Seventh-day Adventist congregation in Flint, Michigan. In addition to my pastoral duties, I was appointed to serve as the Inner Cities Ministry Director for the Lake Region Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. One of the areas of training that I was attracted to was Elder Care. So, I was granted permission to be trained as a Certified Senior Advisor. Weekly, I would watch videos that spoke to the challenges that our senior population was wrestling with. Although I did not pass the exam, this experience exposed me to invaluable information that my senior members would benefit from. For example, the benefits checkup website allows seniors to input their information concerning all the government benefits that they are receiving and learn of additional ones they are entitled to. During Fairhaven's Annual Health Fair, we assisted our elders and community friends in compiling this information for free. They were then able to gather the information and have the government update their current benefits.

One of the classes explained the Social Security Benefits Program. I learned that divorced individuals who were married for at least ten years were entitled to their former spouse's higher social security benefits if they had not remarried or were unmarried at the time. I shared this information with several seniors. One of them was able to benefit and receive additional government funds. The Social Security Administration not only increased their monthly check, but they also went back and paid them for the previous three months.

Personal Life Experience

As I grew up, my maternal grandmother's house was my home away from home. I have numerous fond memories of eating sweet potato pie and popsicles and drinking Borden's chocolate milk. As I transitioned into my teen years, both my maternal and paternal grandmothers ' health began deteriorating. A series of strokes restricted their independence. My maternal grandmother, with assistance from her children, had been caring for her youngest son, who had Cerebral Palsy. Her most recent strokes had made this impossible. Determined to keep Granny and her baby boy from going to a long-term care facility, my family rallied to share their healthcare responsibilities. It saddens me to watch my Granny's health slowly fail because I sensed that she would not be with me much longer. It was an honor for me to be a member of her healthcare team because we were able to make her final days as comfortable as possible. By staying with my grandmother, I was able to allow my mother to go home and rest in her bed at night.

As my Granny was transitioning, my father learned that his cancer had not only come out of remission, but it had also spread from his lungs to his bones. His condition forced him to retire from the Texaco Oil Company and move in with his sister and brother-in-law. Within four months, he was too weak to walk. His older brother had to pick him up and transport him from one place to another. One January evening in 1979, Daddy asked me to assist him in shaving. I was honored to help, even though I had not begun to shave myself. As I touched him with the lather, he complained that my hands were extremely cold and to please warm them on the gas heater. The bone cancer had caused Daddy's skin to become extremely sensitive to temperature. That was really the

only time that I heard him complain during his ailment. Four months later, Charles Ray Osborne, Jr., passed away in his sleep on the morning of Monday, May 21, 1979.

On the morning of September 19, 2020, my eighty-six-year-old mother joined her fellow church family to pass out food boxes to the Houston Acres Homes Community. Upon exiting the car, the members of the Hebron Seventh-day Adventist Church recognized that Mom was late. Additionally, she was moving rather slowly, and her face was disfigured. Three nurses were on duty at the food pantry. They quickly examined her and determined that she was experiencing a stroke. Further evaluations at the hospital revealed that she had suffered not only a stroke but also a heart attack. Two days later, she had two stents installed in her heart. A few days later, we transferred her to a rehabilitation center for three weeks of therapy. After four weeks of medical care in Houston, I drove her to our home in Florissant, Missouri. My family and I took on the roles of being cooks, chauffeurs, housekeepers, nurses, pharmacists, secretaries, and business managers. Sometimes, I even felt that I had become Momma's parent. Even as I am writing, we are trying to make sure that all the pieces are in place to support Mom in her recovery process at home. Mom is a very active and independent person. As we are preparing to return her back to her house to "age in place," we are forced to consider what life will look like in the immediate future for her. In other words, my Mom needs to remain active so that she will feel valued and not isolated.

Skills Developed from Working with Seniors

As a result of the educational, personal, and professional training, there are several skills that God has cultivated within me. First, I have learned to be more

empathetic towards senior adults. It is difficult for me to observe any individual who is suffering. It is even more painful for me to witness adults facing difficulties in their final stages of life. Recently, I had a revelation. In the early years of pastoral ministry, I used to discourage my seniors from stating that they were tired. In other words, they wanted to give up on life and just die. They were tired of inhaling medication, being in pain, and being a shell of the active people that they used to be. They were also tired of the treatments, which were just causing them to exist. I was uncomfortable hearing that they were tired. As I entered my thirtieth year of pastoral ministry, I have finally embraced their position. Many seniors have reached a point in life where they are limited in what they can do. Their health is in decline. Their loved ones and friends are in the process of passing away. They are unable to travel as in previous times. Their engagement with the activities of the church has been reduced or even cut off. Although I believe that I have grasped an idea of why homebound seniors are feeling the way that they do, my heart still hurts for them. For them, death is a welcome rest and relief from the cares of this world.

God has also gifted me with the patience to work with senior adults. I want to be very clear that I am not suggesting by any means that I am perfect in my services to seniors. There are times when I struggle with serving them. I wrestle with their agenda not being my agenda. Seniors have a specified timeframe in which they want to see something completed. They also have a particular way that they like things to be done. There are some seniors whom I may not visit as often. When I sit down to talk and listen, I do believe that they are aware that I am concerned about what they are experiencing. They also know that if they are sick, I will do my best to visit and check on them. Seniors

know that if I can help them, I am more than willing to do what I can to assist them in seeking a solution to their problems.

As I transition towards becoming a senior, I have become a resource for the aged. That does not mean that I know all the answers to their questions. There are programs that I am acquainted with that I can inform others about. When I am unsure of the answers to the challenges that they are facing, God seems to direct me to the right individuals to network with to search for a solution to their predicament.

Even as I am writing this chapter, God disclosed another resource to me. We are presently in our second year of the coronavirus pandemic. There are numerous obstacles that are interfering with inner-city residents from being vaccinated. Some well-intentioned Christians believe that taking the vaccine demonstrates a lack of faith in God. They do not trust the government because of the Tuskegee Airmen experiment. There is the feeling that this is just another conspiracy to either eliminate more minorities or to test something on them.

Many seniors do not have access to the technology that is necessary for them to sign up for the vaccine. Others are struggling to navigate through the available websites to sign up. Some are having problems getting transportation to the designated sites where the vaccines are being offered. Several of my associates have sent information that our church was able to share with others about more vaccination sites that were opening in the city of St. Louis. The pandemic has caused us to collaborate more to battle this virus and its effects.

I have also discovered that many homebound seniors are the best resources of all. They are more than willing to share the resource information that they have discovered.

For example, when I was attempting to sign up for the vaccine, one of my seniors directed me to several websites that were offering the medication. This confirms the fact that being a homebound senior may limit them, but it does not prevent them from being of service.

The Synergy

Five and a half years ago, when I was transferred to St. Louis, Missouri, I had no idea that it would place me on a collision course for a doctorate program. It was not the smoothest transition. I was separated from my family for several months while my wife and children completed their school term. During the nearly twelve-hour drive from Denver, I experienced two rear flat tires. Some let it be known that they missed the previous pastor by leaving the church. Although my predecessor tried his best to aid me, the transition was not as smooth as I would have preferred. I hope that no one else has to go through a similar situation.

During one of my conversations with my predecessor, I learned of two ministries that the church was conducting. On Tuesday mornings, the church's food pantry addressed the community's physical needs. As a bonus, the church offered a weekly Bible study for those who were willing to attend. Some would attend so that they could get to the head of the food line before others. Before I had received all the information, I feared that this was another activity to keep the pastor busy. The pastor soon relieved my mounting stress when he shared that there were members who were responsible for performing this ministry. All that I was expected to do was to make an occasional appearance and greet the Bible students. I figured that I could do that.

Several Bible students became members of our church family. One sister's very first Sabbath of attending was the Sabbath to which we were introduced. Within a few weeks, she joined our church. Sadly, eight months later, she passed away.

Within a few years, we had gone through three Bible Study leaders. By the fourth year, my fears had been realized. The Food Pantry Bible Study was now under my leadership. I really did not know what to expect. Over the years, some of the attendees could be combative. There was also a clashing of different personalities. I was pleasantly surprised to see the class begin to grow once again. One day, I copied a limited number of lessons so that we would not waste any paper or ink. I was forced to return to my office and make additional copies. If my memory serves me correctly, I returned to my office four times to secure more copies of the Bible studies. Then it happened! Just as our weekly attendance was reaching the twenties, the pandemic struck, and we were forced to shut down. Recently, I was thinking about those who were members of our class, and God revealed to me that most of them were senior adults. They really looked forward to coming every week and studying together. A few weeks ago, someone asked when we were going to start Bible study classes again. These seniors are struggling with being isolated from the opportunity to study together.

The second Bible study class took place on Tuesday evenings. It was a discipleship session. New and not-so-new believers met at the church and studied the word of God. Most of the students were senior adults. From time to time, we had attendees who were under fifty-five years of age, other than me. After a few years, we noticed that several of our new members lived in the John Newman Senior Building in Ferguson, Missouri. The question arose whether this facility would be an ideal location

for Berean to reap additional souls. The students agreed to move out of the church to this new location. For just over two years, we studied and built relationships with the residents of the building. There were even days when we would have dinner together.

There were some Tuesdays when I could not facilitate Bible study. Either I was exhausted from other pastoral duties, or an emergency demanded my attention. I was impressed to request the assistance of one of our church members who lived in the building. This forced me to acknowledge that I cannot do it all and that God has not called me to try to do it all. I am glad to say that our member was honored to be invited to teach the class. When I returned to the Bible study, the other students confirmed that my replacement had done well in my absence. From that point onward, she became my permanent backup instructor.

Several months later, the virus shut down our class. The Senior Building would no longer allow visitors to enter, but this would not be an obstacle for my co-teacher. She continued to conduct individual Bible studies in her neighbors' apartments.

I must admit that I had begun to question God about our senior Bible study class. Had I been led by the right spirit? Was I leaning on my own understanding? If God were leading us, then there should be some individuals who were desirous of joining our church family. Should we have just stayed at the Berean Church Building?

One afternoon, God answered my questions. I was impressed to make a check-up call to my co-teacher and learn about her well-being. She answered the phone and expressed that she was planning to call me. I wondered why. She said, “I have one for you!” I responded, “What do you mean that you have one for me?” My co-teacher reminded me that one of the ladies who had attended our Bible study group was now

studying with her. This dear sister was now interested in joining our congregation. I began to praise God that our labors had not been in vain. God's words had not returned unto him void.

On February 27, 2021, we baptized this dear sister into the Berean Seventh-day Adventist Church. On the same Sabbath that she joined, another John Newman Senior Building Bible student also came to church. After worship services, this dear sister wanted to know what she had to do to join our church family. To God be the glory for the great things that He has done! By moving the Bible study from the church facility to the Senior Building, God was nurturing my co-teacher to spread the Gospel to her neighbors. Even though the pandemic isolated her from church fellowship, God used her to discipline her fellow residents. Although we have seniors who are homebound, many still have talents that they want to use.

The Point of Intersection

One of the attributes of God that I am learning to appreciate is His ability to multitask. I have concluded that God directed the Osborne Family to St. Louis, Missouri, for multiple reasons. My dear wife loves to point out that God takes all our prayers into account and answers them for the best good of all who are involved. First, there is no doubt that the transfer would allow us to be closer to our family. On the one hand, we were blessed to move within six and a half hours from one of our mothers. We were glad to be able to drive and not be forced to pay for four airline tickets. This transition also allowed us to live nearer our children while they were furthering their education in

Huntsville, Alabama. I am so grateful that we are only a six-and-a-half-hour drive in comparison to commuting nineteen hours to their location.

In addition, this transition was to force me to be less self-reliant and more God-dependent. During these five-plus years of service, I have certainly witnessed God moving in mysterious ways. He demonstrated that there were still greater miracles to be worked in these final moments of Earth's history than in the past. Thirdly, God was grooming me to be more sensitive to the senior adult congregants under my leadership. Who would have thought that God would employ two Bible Study classes to draw out my God-given gifts, to address the needs of the Berean Seventh-day Adventist senior members and others in our local community? Who knew that God was moving me five and a half hours away from Dayton, Ohio, to complete a Doctor of Ministry degree?

Conclusion

Bert Kruger Smith, "Letter to a New Pastor," is a challenge to all of us.

> In pockets of every town and city are the invisible old, the ones who have grown old and then poor or ill or both, who are out of sight in their homes or rooms, existing only with vestiges of pride and large quantities of aloneness. They may feel shame that they do not have the clothes for going to worship or the transportation to get there. They may be unable to contribute much money; their ride is all that is left; and they sometimes hold it in their lonely rooms. They won't trouble you. You may not even know they are present. Until you are called upon to perform the funeral service you may not realize that they are dying from the grave affliction of loneliness.[7]

During my first year of pastoring a particular church, I was working to learn who my members were. One Sabbath, I was talking to one of my homebound members' family. They were kind enough to share some information with me. After our

[7] Bert Kruger Smith, *Letter to a New Pastor* (Austin, TX: Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, 1981), 8.

conversation, I was looking forward to connecting with the family. The next morning, I received a telephone call informing me that my dear sister had passed away the day before. While I was asking about her, she had passed away in the hospital. I felt like such a failure as a shepherd. My member died, and I did not know that she was in the hospital. I had not been granted the opportunity to minister to her in her time of need. Although there is no guarantee that this will not happen again, I want to do all within my power to empower homebound seniors to continue to live useful lives.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

In many ways, homebound senior adults are isolated from discipleship opportunities within their congregations. This doctoral project aims to assist them in moving from being isolated to becoming integrated into church life through discipleship opportunities. During the past five-plus years of service, there were opportunities to witness God moving in mysterious ways. Through two Bible Study classes, God has been grooming me to be more sensitive to the senior adult congregants under my leadership and to address the needs of our neighbors in the surrounding community. He demonstrated there were still greater miracles to be worked in these final moments of Earth's history than in the past.

Berean is fortunate to have numerous seniors who are actively involved in the ministries of the church. They hold positions, teach, serve in the food pantry, care for the church facility, conduct Bible studies, check on those homebound, and serve in various other ways. However, with the realization of the frailty of life, those who are mobile today may very well be immobile tomorrow. Nevertheless, physical immobility does not necessarily mean that these saints do not have something more to offer than their financial support. Unfortunately, I have witnessed numerous individuals transition from

being active to being inactive and just fading away. Some even transitioned from having a stable mind to dementia.

All Homebound Seniors are not like the eighty-seven-year-old who temporarily lives with us. She was a very active and independent woman. On September 16, 2020, she suffered a stroke and a heart attack. Mom has clarified that she wants to age in her own home. One of the ways that she has assisted in her personal rehabilitation is through crocheting. Over six months, Mom has crocheted at least ten Afghan blankets for the members of the congregation that we serve. However, that is not the testimony of all Homebound Seniors. Some of them are not motivated to reinvent themselves and find a way to remain active. Others want to be involved and need assistance in finding their way to usefulness again. It is my desire that this doctoral project assist Homebound Seniors to move from a state of being isolated to usefulness again.

After reviewing several passages, I was led to the seventy-first chapter of Psalms. The text shares the struggle of an anonymous author who is facing multiple battles. On the one hand, there is a war with an unnamed enemy. At the same time, the writer is wrestling with the fear of being isolated from God during their final years of life. Homebound Older Adults are also struggling with being separated from their God and their Church Family in their remaining years. In this chapter, I will review the literary style of the text and raise questions on its authorship, historical background, and social context. Next, I will give an exegetical study of the passage. Finally, I will share how this passage will influence my research project.

Literary

The seventy-first division of the Psalms is composed of twenty-four verses. The New Living Translation of Psalm Chapter Seventy-One reads as follows:

> O Lord, I have come to you for protection; don't let me be disgraced. Save me and rescue me, for you do what is right. Turn your ear to listen to me, and set me free. Be my rock of safety where I can always hide. Give the order to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress. My God, rescue me from the power of the wicked, from the clutches of cruel oppressors. O Lord, you alone are my hope. I've trusted you, O Lord, from childhood. Yes, you have been with me from birth; from my mother's womb you have cared for me. No wonder I am always praising you! My life is an example to many, because you have been my strength and protection. That is why I can never stop praising you; I declare your glory all day long. And now, in my old age, don't set me aside. Don't abandon me when my strength is failing. For my enemies are whispering against me. They are plotting together to kill me. They say, "God has abandoned him. Let's go and get him, for no one will help him now." O God, don't stay away. My God, please hurry to help me. Bring disgrace and destruction on my accusers. Humiliate and shame those who want to harm me. But I will keep on hoping for your help; I will praise you more and more. I will tell everyone about your righteousness. All day long I will proclaim your saving power, though I am not skilled with words. I will praise your mighty deeds, O Sovereign Lord. I will tell everyone that you alone are just. O God, you have taught me from my earliest childhood, and I constantly tell others about the wonderful things you do. Now that I am old and gray, do not abandon me, O God. Let me proclaim your power to this new generation, your mighty miracles to all who come after me. Your righteousness, O God, reaches to the highest heavens. You have done such wonderful things. Who can compare with you, O God? You have allowed me to suffer much hardship, but you will restore me to life again and lift me up from the depths of the earth. You will restore me to even greater honor and comfort me once again. Then I will praise you with music on the harp, because you are faithful to your promises, O my God. I will sing praises to you with a lyre, O Holy One of Israel. I will shout for joy and sing your praises, for you have ransomed me. I will tell about your righteous deeds all day long, for everyone who tried to hurt me has been shamed and humiliated (Ps. 71:1-24, NLT).

Authorship

Psalms chapter seventy-one is one of several Psalms that do not have a title ascribed to it.[1] The titles not only credited the author, but they also shared with us the

[1] John Barton and John Muddiman, eds., *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 386.

context for the composing of the text. The absence of a title generates questions concerning who penned these words. The *Word Biblical Commentary Psalm 51-100*, shares the following insight:

> The LXX (The Septuagint) supplies a Davidic title for 71 (the Targum does not), in keeping with the tendency to 'davidize' the psalms in later traditions. In 206 Psalm 70:1-6 Pss 3-89, only 10, 33, 43 and 71 lack titles in the MT (Masoretic Text). Wilson (131) notes that in each case there is manuscript evidence for combining each of the psalms in question with the psalm which precedes it. The LXX combines 9 and 10 but supplies titles for the others. Wilson (97) also notes that in the Qumran 4QPsa fragment g, 71:1 follows immediately at the end of Ps 38, with no indication of separation the psalms were read together.[2]

Although the seventy-first Division of the Psalms does not have a title, there are a few reasons why David can be credited with being his author. First, scholars have suggested that Psalm Chapter Seventy-One is a continuation of Psalm Chapter Seventy:[3]

> Many ancient manuscripts combine Psalms 70 with 71, pointing to the possibility that the two once were a single composition. This seems to be supported by the fact that Psalm 71 does not have a separate heading and by a number of verbal and thematic links between the two poems (e.g The unusual khushah, 'hasten,' which serves as an inclusion in vv. 1 and 5, appear twice in 71:12 at an important place but rarely throughout the test of the Psalms).[4]

If this is accurate, then we can also accept David's authorship of both. Secondly, Psalm chapter seven is almost a direct quote from Psalm 40:13-17, which David also penned.[5]

The seventh division of the Psalm says,

> Be pleased, O God, to deliver me. O LORD, make haste to help me! Let those be put to shame and confusion who seek my life. Let those be turned back and

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[2] Marvin E. Tate, *Word Biblical Commentary Psalm 51-100*, vol. 20 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 205-206.

[3] Barton and Muddiman, *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 386.

[4] Angel Manuel Rodriquez, ed., *Andrew Bible Commentary* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2020), 708.

[5] Rodriquez, *Andrew Bible Commentary*, 708.

> brought to dishonor who desire to hurt me. Let those who say, "Aha, Aha!" turn back because of their shame. Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you. Let those who love your salvation say evermore, "God is great!" But I am poor and needy; hasten to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay! (Ps. 70:1-5, NRSVUE).

Psalm 40:13-17:

> Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me; O Lord, make haste to help me. Let those be put to shame and confusion who seek to snatch away my life; let those be turned back and brought to dishonor who desire my hurt. Let those be appalled because of their shame who say unto me, "Aha, aha!" But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation say continually, "Great is the Lord!" As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God.
> (Ps. 40:13-17, NRSVUE).

Therefore, I am comfortable supporting David as the composer of Psalm chapters seventy and seventy-one. Although Psalm chapters seventy and seventy-one are one psalm, my attention will be focused on the seventy-first Psalm.

Historical

There is another point of concern regarding this research. There does not appear to be a clear consensus concerning the historical background of this psalm. As previously noted, the authorship is unknown. The *Word Biblical Commentary Psalms 51-100* shares how some argue for both pre-exile and post-exile authorship. But many authors support the school of thought that they were penned during the early years after the exile.[6] It was affirmed that there is enough evidence to support that David was more than likely the author of Psalms Chapters Seventy and Seventy-one.

[6] Tate, *Word Biblical Commentary Psalms 51-100*, 212.

Social Context

How was this prayer used among Israel? It was a song of remembrance. There is also a common consensus that these twenty-four verses compose a prayer. The New Interpreter's Bible points out the unique way the Psalmist lays out his supplication. The following progression was chosen: verses one through four, petition; verses five through eight, trust and praise; verses nine through thirteen, petition and complaint; verses fourteen through seventeen, trust and praise; verses eighteen, petition; verses nineteen through twenty-four, trust and praise.[7]

Exegesis

Within the first petition, we can see the connection between Psalms Chapters Seventy and Seventy-one.

> Be pleased, O God, to deliver me. O LORD, make haste to help me! Let those be put to shame and confusion who seek my life. Let those be turned back and brought to dishonor who desire to hurt me. Let those who say, "Aha, Aha!" turn back because of their shame. Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you. Let those who love your salvation say evermore, "God is great!" But I am poor and needy; hasten to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay! (Ps. 70:1-5, NRSVUE).

> In you, O LORD, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me. Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress. Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and cruel (Ps. 71:1-4, NRSVUE).

It is evident within these early verses that the author is in a desperate state. Miriam Dunson seems to agree when she states that:

> The theme in this psalm shows the psalmist facing the realities of life. It is filled with anxiety, struggle, and hurt. This is not a dream world we live in, but life is

[7] Michael E. Lawrence, ed., *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 4 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 958.

difficult and filled with anguish, as in, "Rescue Me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked" (v. 4).[8]

He sounds an urgent cry to His God to be rescued from his enemies again.[9] Yet he begins by confirming and affirming his faith in God. In this situation, he does not want to experience confusion. This reminds me of my mother's prayer to her God that He would keep her in her right mind. Like so many, David knows the danger of leaning to his understanding. The king may have been reflecting upon the foolishness of killing one of his elite soldiers to conceal his entanglement with Bathsheba. Like so many others, he had convinced himself that he had gotten away with his crime. However, for the remainder of David's life, his children's lifestyle would disclose the repercussions of his transgressions.

The king may have even recalled his sin of numbering Israel's military, although this was a practice that God had warned against. This royal action caused the monarchs to place their trust in humanity rather than in divinity. Even David's immoral General Joab attempted to stir up the King's conscience, but he was ignored. As a result of David's choice, many of his subjects were eliminated (2 Sm. 24). In Psalm 70:2, David prayed that his enemies would be put to shame and confounded. He uses "buwsh" for ashamed and to be disappointed. Then, he employs the word "chapher" for confounded. "Chapher" can also be defined as "to blush" or "be ashamed."

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[8] Miriam Dunson, *A Very Present Help: Psalm Studies for Older Adults*, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1999), 69.

[9] Bill Blackburn, "Psalm 71," *Review and Expositor* 88, no. 3 (1991): 241-245.

Examples of Enemies Being Put to Shame

The author longs for His God to put his enemies to shame, as Absalom was when he dishonored his father and attempted to touch God's anointed. The young prince who aspired to be king would be executed for his actions in 2 Samuel 18:15. He longed for the Lord to shame this enemy as he had shamed Goliath of Gath in the Valley of Elah. David wanted them to embarrass them as God had dealt with the one who had insulted the Lord but also David (1 Sm. 17). I do not know if there is such a thing as double shame, but David seems to be requesting it for his enemies!

"Buwsh" can also be defined as "confounded." In Psalm 70:2, David is praying for his enemies to be put to shame and for them to be confused. In Psalm 71:1, he pleads that this will not be his lot. When we are suffering through trials, religious and non-religious individuals can cause us to "be ashamed" and question whether God is on our side. They have the nerve to suggest that if God were on our side, He would have moved quickly to deliver us from our circumstances. The propaganda of these enemies may even cause us to question whether our cause is just one. "The psalmist trusted God through the years and doesn't want egg on his face now by being let down, an outcome that surely would tarnish God's reputation."[10]

David is Pursued by an Unnamed Enemy

In verse two, David gives an imperative command for deliverance based on the righteousness of God. "The appeal to divine 'righteousness' in verse two (a) is a plea for the activation of Yahweh's will for justice, for the vindication of the innocent who are

[10] David Platt, Matt Mason, and Jim Shaddix, *Exalting Jesus in Psalms 51-100* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2020), 157.

oppressed; in general, for the setting right of affairs in human life and for the saving of those devoted to Yahweh."[11] Although we are not acquainted with the specific incident that David demands deliverance from, he certainly had numerous occasions of being stalked.

David's Father-in-Law is Eliminated

As a young man, David was pursued by the King of Israel. It is terrible to be harassed by an employer, but it is worse to be hassled by a father-in-law. One day, while he was entertaining the king, a spear was thrown at him (1 Sm. 19:9-10). On another occasion, David's wife aided him in escaping her mentally troubled father's soldiers (1 Sm. 19:11). A short time later, David's brother-in-law had to investigate whether the accusations of an assassination plot were true or not. Although David was promised the kingdom, he respected Saul's position so much that he would not do anything to bring harm to the king. When another falsely claimed to have taken Saul's life, King David held them accountable for not valuing Saul's life (2 Sm. 1:1-16).

David's Enemy, Shimei, is Eliminated

As previously mentioned, David's character was slandered by one of King Saul's relatives. The King's escape route passed right by Shimei's house. Shimei cursed, attempted to stone, and accused the King of being a bloody man. The King was indeed responsible for the death of Uriah, but God was chastising him. His soldiers wanted to end the man's freedom of speech, but the King would not permit it (2 Sm. 16:7-13). However, the King hoped that one day, he would be vindicated. "It may be that the Lord

[11] Tate, *Word Biblical Commentary Psalms 51-10,* 213.

will look on my distress, and the Lord will repay me with good for this cursing of me today." (2 Sm. 16:12, NRSVUE).

As David abdicated the throne of Israel in favor of Solomon, he charged the new king with several tasks. One of the responsibilities was wisely dealing with Shimei (1 Kgs. 2:8-9). Solomon promised Shimei that he would be safe if he remained in solitary confinement on his property. However, as soon as he left his property, he would suffer the consequences. Three years later, justice was served when the Shimei disobeyed the king and left his property in pursuit of two runaway servants. Not only did he break his covenant with the new king, but he did not extend the same mercy that had been extended to him. Solomon executed Shimei. God faithfully dealt with another one of David's enemies (2 Sm. 2:36-46).

David's Son is Eliminated

On another occasion, after Absalom's coup was squashed, another attempted to seize David's throne. Sheba convinced the people to follow him and abandon David. This would result in him being executed by the townspeople (2 Sm. 20). God faithfully dealt with David's enemies. Biblical characters are not the only ones who have sought the Lord for justice.

God Will Also Eliminate Our Enemies

In 2021, justice was needed in the United States of America. It is evident that the country that brags about justice and freedom is still very flawed. Although there are numerous good police officers, many are out of control. As an African American Male, I

am struggling with the alarming rate at which African-American males are dying at the hands of law enforcement agencies. It is dangerous to drive, shop, or eat ice cream in one's home while being a minority. There seems to be an attitude of killing first and asking no questions later. At the same time, those who are not minorities arrive at the police station safely after having a meal purchased for them by the arresting officers. There are even those who are guilty and are being bonded out by celebrities. Like King David, I want to witness justice and not excuses. I felt so much better after former Minnesota Police Officer Derrick Chavin was convicted and sentenced for the death of George Floyd. I believe that Jesus is coming very soon, and He is bringing everyone's reward with Him (Rv. 22:12). But how much longer are we going to have to cope with individuals who believe that skin tone, economic status, and position grant them a license to act recklessly with other people's lives. I want to see justice on this side of the Resurrection.

David Found a Storm Shelter in the Midst of His Stormy Life

In Psalm 71:3, The New Revised Standard Version says: "Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress." Several years ago, my family and I lived in the Northern Oklahoma City of Edmond. Oklahoma is one of the cities in the dangerous corridor known as Tornado Alley. In May of 1999, I witnessed the destructive forces of a tornado. A neighborhood I visited on a Sunday afternoon had vanished by Monday evening. One of the safety features that you can purchase is called a storm shelter. It can be installed in your yard or on the floor of your

garage. The storm shelter cannot benefit those who do not take advantage of it. Residents must run to the shelter for protection when the storm sirens sound.

King David has found God to be his storm shelter. God is not a cardboard box but a storm-resistant place of safety, a cave of protection. Human inventions will undoubtedly fail, but God is always a sure thing. David has visited numerous caves not only as a shepherd but also as a fugitive. God was always there for him as a shelter during his storm. Therefore, the King is seeking shelter in the safety of his God.

David Reaffirms His Trust in God

In Psalm 71:5, 6 (NRSVUE), the King reaffirms where his hope and trust are located. “For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth From my birth I have leaned upon you, my protector since my mother’s womb. My praise is continually of you” (Ps. 71:5, 6, NRSVUE).

One of the greatest blessings in this life is to have a clear understanding of where our strength comes from. Some believe it is from their giftedness, but they ignore who gifted them. In reflection, David recognizes that there has never been an occasion when God has not been actively involved in his life. The Lord has directed his journey all along the way. He directed him as a shepherd in preparation for leading the Children of Israel. He led him as a warrior on the battlefields against God’s enemies. He led him as a musician within the royal palace to calm a maniacal leader. He led him as a fugitive in the Judean wilderness. He also led him from the clutches of his demon-possessed son.

David Found a Lifeline in His Storms

David acknowledges that God was with him in the womb. L. Juliana M. Claassens identifies the hope in the image of God as a midwife when she says: "The key image in the psalm that transforms it into a redemptive hope is the image of God as midwife in verse 6. Like a midwife, God acts to bring forth life even in the midst of pain-even when the mother may suffer death."[12]

With all the complications that accompany the birthing process, God was there to ensure a smooth delivery. In Psalms 71:5, one of the definitions for hope is "tiqvah." "For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth." The word hope can be defined as "a cord as an attachment." David does not want his divine umbilical cord to God to be disconnected. He has witnessed King Saul's mental instability from being disconnected from God. Therefore, he will continue to praise His God, who has been his hope and trust throughout his life.

Foundational Pericope

We have now arrived at the passages that I want to focus upon. In verses nine to thirteen, the Psalmist begins his second set of petitions. As David continues his journaling, he seems more comfortable disclosing a few details concerning his dilemma.

> Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength is spent. For my enemies speak concerning me, and those who watch for my life consult together. They say, "Pursue and seize that person whom God has forsaken, for there is no one to deliver" (Ps. 71:9-11, NRSVUE).

Although he has testified to God being omnipresent from his birth, this present problem seems to be causing David to second-guess God. His enemies are present and

[12] L. J. M. Claassens, "Praying from the Depths of the Deep: Remembering the Image of God as Midwife in Psalm 71," *Review and Expositor* 104, no. 4 (2007): 761–775.

slandering his character. They are present, stalking and setting traps for him. They are present and taunting him by suggesting that God has forsaken the man after God's own heart (1 Sm. 13:14).

One of Satan's favorite forms of propaganda is to suggest that when we go through an ordeal, it is because God no longer loves us and He has forsaken us. Although the Bible is clear that God chastens those whom He loves (Heb. 12:6), if repetition is beneficial, the author appears to be attempting to encourage himself, his audience, and even future readers that their God will faithfully defend their cause. The two verses that we have chosen to focus on are Psalm 71:9, 18. "Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength is spent. So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come" (Ps. 71:9, 18 NRSVUE).

Various Views of this Scriptural Passage

Some view these verses as a symbolic statement by the author. They suggest that the composer is pointing towards the future when they become seniors, and they are praying that God will not forsake them.[13] Yet I am inclined to support the idea that an aged saint is looking for God to act in their present situation, as in the past.[14] Especially when we consider verses five, six, and seventeen, "For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth. From my birth I have leaned upon you, my protector since

[13] Tate, *Word Biblical Commentary Psalms 51-10,* 216.

[14] Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Commentary on the Second Book of Psalms* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2009), 184.

my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you. O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds" (Ps. 71:5, 6, 17).

Young people have suffered a great deal of adversity in their brief lives. My parents divorced during my youth, and several of my close relatives breathed their last breath during this same period. Youth know what it is to be dissected by the saints of God. Youth know what it is to be mistreated by those who share the same DNA that they have. For example, Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers because of his father's favoritism. David was mocked by his elder brothers when he fought Goliath. Many young people experienced pain from the saints within the church, as well as without the fellowship of believers. Timothy was despised because of his youth. I can recall an incident during my seminary years when an older saint referred to me as "an almost preacher." Since I had not received ecclesiastical endorsement from The Seventh-day Adventist Church, I was viewed as an almost preacher. However, I was viewed as the assistant pastor when they wanted me to perform a disagreeable task. I wasted no time sharing that I could not perform their request because I was not on the church's payroll.

As a result of how church members treated them, many determined that when they grew up, they would no longer fellowship with their home congregation. Numerous overzealous saints have injured youths assuming the role of the Holy Spirit through their spiritual growing pains. Their pain is very real. However, when I review these verses, there is something about this saint's testimony that reveals that they know what it is to have been the recipient of God's repeated deliverance. These six stanzas reminded us that age does not exempt us from life's challenges. During my teenage years, I was under the delusion that with age comes an elimination or reduction in problems. Now that I am near

sixty, I have embraced the reality that we will all encounter difficulties during each stage of life until we inhale our final breath. We graduate to new or advanced trials.

The mixture of faith and fear is not unique to advanced years, but perhaps it is more pronounced. At the heart of the aging process is dissipated strength, diminished capacity, a feeling, and a reality of vulnerability.[15]

It was in David's later years that Absalom unsuccessfully overthrew his father's kingdom. David would be forced to reorganize his forces. He divides his troops into three groups. However, the people refused to permit him to go out to fight. His subjects convinced him to remain behind while they went to fight. He had to embrace the reality that he was too old to be out on the battlefield (2 Sm. 18). Previously, we mentioned that David leaned on human understanding and began to put his trust in himself and his soldiers. Even his nephew, who was not the most moral individual, warned him that this was a bad idea. However, David ignored him. He sent out Joab to number his fighting men. However, the Holy Spirit kept collaborating with The King, and he acknowledged his sin. God gave him three options. He chose the three days of plagues. After the destruction of 70,000 at the end of the first day, God mercifully stopped the plague (2 Sm. 24).

David Struggles with the Justice of God

In the last section of Psalms 71:19, which states, "and your righteousness, O God, reach the high heavens. You who have done great things, O God, who is like you?" David celebrates the faithfulness of His God. He testifies to His righteousness or justice. As David recalls the great things God has done on his behalf, he concludes that there is

[15] Bill Blackburn, "Psalm 71," *Review and Expositor* 88, no. 3 (1991): 241.

no other God like Him. Indeed, justice will be served. One day, his name would be vindicated. The charges that had been levied against his character would be proven false.

On June 30, 2021, Dr. William Cosby was released from prison. During the interview in front of the Cosby home, one of the attorneys expressed his confidence that he knew this day would come. He knew that Mr. Cosby would be vindicated and freed from prison. Although everyone does not agree that justice was served in this case, God will have the last word. It is with this same surety that David trusts in his God.

But in verse twenty, David unexpectedly does an about-face. "You who have made me see many troubles and calamities will revive me again; from the depths of the earth you will bring me up again. You will increase my honor and comfort me once again" (Ps. 71:20-21, NRSVUE).

The God whom the psalmist has expressed complete confidence in is now confronted about the trials that he is encountering. David is wrestling with the sovereignty of God. He is blaming God for his situation. Why would God permit this crisis to arise in his life? The phrase "will revive me again; from the depths of the earth," sounds as though David has gone through a near-death experience. Not in the sense that he was walking towards a light, but that he is daily living with the possibility of death. Claassens has suggested that the author "vacillates between praying to God for deliverance and holding God responsible for the calamities that have befallen him."[16]

The language sounds like someone being resurrected to a new life. David would be resuscitated from his circumstances, and God would raise him from the grave. He would increase his greatness. Like Job, his end would be greater than his beginning.

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[16] L. J. M. Claassens, *Mourner, Mother, Midwife: Reimaging God's Delivering Presence in the Old Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 74.

In verses twenty-two to twenty-four, he promises to keep his word and give His God the praise.

> I will also praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God; I will sing praises to you with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel. My lips will shout for joy when I sing praises to you; my soul also, which you have rescued. All day long my tongue will talk of your righteous help, for those who tried to do me harm have been put to shame and disgraced (Ps. 71:22-24, NRSVUE).

The king is going to let everything that has breath praise God. The shepherd will praise God with the psaltery. The soloist will praise in song. The musician will praise God on the harp. The judge will speak about God's justice and how it left his enemies speechless. This senior has no inhibitions about proclaiming the justice of the Lord.

Conclusion

In his book entitled *Praying the Psalms,* he suggests that the psalms reflect two very basic movements in everyone's life. The first is the move into the "pit." It happens when our world collapses around us, and we feel that there is no way out of the deep hole into which we have sunk. The second is the move out of the pit into a welcome place. We suddenly understand what has happened and who has brought us up out of the pit. This is another way of capturing that movement from life to death, from the Cross to the Resurrection.

Brueggemann further suggests that human beings regularly find themselves in one of three places: 1) a place of orientation, in which everything makes sense in our lives, 2) a place of disorientation, in which we feel we have sunk into the pit; and 3) a place of

new orientation, in which we realize that God has lifted us out of the pit, and we are in a new place full of gratitude and awareness about our lives and our God.[17]

In conclusion, the seventy-first Division of the Psalms discloses one of the numerous struggles that senior adults encounter in their final stage of life. After my mother's stroke and heart attack, I visited her at the Houston Hermann Memorial Hospital. In the elevator, I met a kind healthcare worker. During our conversation, I shared that I was on my way to spending time with my ailing mother. She was excited that I was checking on my mother. Sadly, she expressed her desire for her children to carve time out of their busy schedules and check on her. If this able-bodied mother does not want to be isolated from her children, how much more does this apply to those who are homebound seniors? Modern Senior Adults take no pleasure in being cut off from their God, family, or church family.

Although they may be confined to their residence because of their poor health, a lack of transportation, a pandemic, or because of them serving as healthcare providers for a loved one, they still need to be involved in the life of the church. Marjory Bankson, the eighty-three-year-old chairperson of the Church of the Savior Council, articulates it best in a lecture on March 20, 2023: "What gives us meaning and purpose is having something to get up for?"

Abraham Joshua Hersche described the feeling like this, "Old men need a vision, not only recreation. Old men need a dream, not only a memory. It takes three things to

[17] Kory Capps, "Rhythm of Life: Orientation, Disorientation, Reorientation," Kory Capps, https://.korycapps.wordpress.com/.2014/10/08/rhythm-of-life-orientation-disorientation-reorientation/.

attain a sense of significant being: God, A Soul, and a moment. And the three are always here. Just to be is a blessing. Just to live is holy."[18]

Seniors still have so much to contribute to the community. The author of Psalm seventy-one petitions God, praises God, and longs to proclaim God to future generations.[19] In verse eighteen, the author declares: "Now also when I am old and grey headed, O God, forsake me not; until I have showed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to everyone that is to come" (Ps. 71:18).

The psalmist's request reminds me of Emily Rauhala's article in the "Washington Post" concerning an eighty-five-year-old Chinese Senior who put himself up for adoption. Mr. Han was a widower. His sons were not involved in his life. His neighbors were busy with their own lives. This lonely grandfather posted the following sign in the bus station that was nearest to his residence:

> Lonely old man in his 80's. Strong-bodied. Can shop, cook and take care of himself. No chronic illness. I retired from a scientific research institute in Tianjin, with a monthly pension of 6,000 RMB ($950) a month, … I won't go to a nursing home. My hope is that a kindhearted person or family will adopt me, nourish me through old age and bury my body when I'm dead.[20]

Sadly, on March 17, 2018, Mr. Han passed away at the hospital. What a terrible story. This man, who had no ailment, suddenly changed his health. Could it be that his depression brought on his ailment? Although he was not alone when he passed away because he was surrounded by the hospital staff. Yet he was so

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[18] Abraham Joshua Heschel, "To Grow In Wisdom," *The Christian Minority* 2 (March 1971): 37.

[19] Platt, Mason, and Shaddix, *Exalting Jesus in Psalms 51-100*, 159.

[20] Emily Rauhala, "He Was One of Millions of Chinese Seniors Growing Old Alone," *Washington Post*, May 2, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/he-was-one-of-millions-of-chinese-seniors-growing-old-alone-so-he-put-himself-up-for-adoption/2018/05/01/53749264-3d6a-11e8-912d-16c9e9b37800_story.html.

desperate for companionship that he posted a sign to be adopted by anyone. Mr. Han wanted to be useful.

David does not want to retire yet. The King may no longer be able to go out to war anymore. He may not be able to play his harp like he used to. However, David still believes he has something to offer the next generation. Jessie's son is not quite washed up yet. He wants to testify about the strength of the Lord. He wants to share what can happen when one depends upon God, a sling, and a stone. He wants the next generation to know that God can deliver from enemies internally and externally. David wants the generation that will follow him to understand that God can fight their battles. The King desires that God will not forsake him until he finishes his course.

> Someone has said that the Christian church is always one generation away from extinction, meaning that each generation has the responsibility of passing Christian doctrine to the next. David knew this. It is what he wants to do. But since he is writing about old age, the uniqueness of what he is saying is that older people have a special and peculiar ability to teach the young. This does not mean that they know more than those in middle age. An old deacon or deaconess does not necessarily know more than his past about the Bible's content. but the old person has lived with God longer and has seen more of God's faithfulness over more years of life than younger people, however much they may know. Therefore, a person like this is especially well equipped to help the young. Haven't you noticed that there is a special natural bond between the elderly and children? The secular world has begun to take advantage of this in nursing homes and kindergartens by bringing people from nursing homes to help care for children in day-care centers and other institutions.[21]

Like David and Mr. Han, some Seniors need to be needed. I want to assist Homebound Seniors to remain involved in ministry until they have completed their course.

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[21] James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms: Volume 2 Psalms 42-106* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 597.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

A little more than four years ago, I sat in my living room, watching the evening news. The breaking news story was quite troubling. The former president, Donald Trump, informed America that there was a virus that was spreading around the world. It appeared that its origin was in China. Although the world had limited information about it, Americans were told we did not have anything to worry about. As the former president spoke, I thought to myself, if he mentions it in a news conference, we must have a reason to be concerned. I was correct. The following forty-eight months were quite traumatic for the citizens of our world. Every few months, we were introduced to new variations of the virus. Many of those who had been previously infected experienced a relapse and have even passed away. Some of those who had been immunized not only developed the COVID-19 virus but also passed away. While others have recovered from the disease, some are still experiencing long-term side effects.

Another challenge with this virus is that it isolated us from one another and limited our ability to travel locally and abroad. Family and friends have been restricted in their capacity to conduct in-person wellness checks, and neighbors have been disconnected from one another. Travel restrictions have prevented families from spending time with family domestically and overseas.

This pandemic exposed a crisis within a crisis that many were not paying attention to. The former Surgeon General of the United States, Dr. Vivck Murthy, has declared that "loneliness is an epidemic in the United States."[1] Although the virus has challenged the Church and others to stay connected to those who are Homebound Seniors, loneliness was already an issue. In his final paper, "My Parting Prescription For America," Dr. Murthy pointed out that: "When we lack meaningful relationships, we can experience loneliness. Currently, around a third of adults and half of young people experience loneliness. Being socially disconnected increases our risk of heart disease, dementia, depression, anxiety, and premature death."[2] As a result of these older adults being disconnected from their church and other family, they experience isolation and are limited in their discipleship opportunities. Churches need to be intentional in keeping older adults engaged in the life of the church.

More than 500 years ago, the world's attention was drawn to fatal disease outbreaks. It was known as the Bubonic or Black Plague. On August 2, 1527, the plague was detected in Wittenberg, Germany, where the University of Wittenberg was located. The Reformer Martin Luther was assigned to pastor and teach in this community. Within a few days of the plague's arrival, Dr. Luther and his colleagues were directed to relocate to Jena. Although the University was moved, Dr. Luther disobeyed the evacuation order and ministered in place. Before the plagues reached Germany, Luther received a letter

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[1] Vivck Murthy, "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation 2023 The U. S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community," Washington, D.C.: Office of The U.S. Surgeon General, May 2023, 4.

[2] Vivck Murthy, "My Parting Prescription For America," Washington, D.C.: Office of The U.S. Surgeon General, January 7, 2025, 13.

from a group of concerned clergymen. They sought counsel as to whether Christians should remain in their plague-infested city or save their lives by escaping the pandemic.

In this Historical Foundation Chapter, I will review Dr. Martin Luther's counsel to these European Ministers who were wrestling with how to respond to the Black Plague in their local community. I will also identify his response to ministering during the Bubonic Plague as it relates to my doctoral project. Dr. Luther's letter relates to my project because Homebound Older Adults are attempting to cope with being lonely, isolated, and not feeling valued. If some type of intervention is not made, they will vanish away. Homebound Senior Adults are neither happy about being separated from their friends nor their loved ones. Seniors need a means of remaining connected to humanity, as well as to their church family.

The Setting

> The Black Death, which from 1347 to 1350 swept out of China or India to the Crimea and thence into Europe and as far as Iceland, killed one-fourth of the population of Europe. This traumatic experience left a deep emotional imprint on the religious life, outlook, art, literature, folk customs, and superstitions of medieval Europe. Four great epidemics swept Germany in the fifteenth century and further ones occurred in the sixteenth. The bubonic plague, as we know it, is spread by infected rats and other vermin. It is communicated to human beings by fleas, through infection in cuts and abrasions of the skin, even (as Luther surmised in the writing that follows) by breathing the air which has been polluted when the sick cough up germs, and by contact with the clothing and excrement of the ill.[3]

By the time the plague had invaded Luther's hometown of Wittenberg, Germany, it had already trampled across the European Continent. This caused a group of Breslau's ministers to seek counsel from Martin Luther. In 1525, Johann Hess articulated the first of a series of letters questioning a Christian's responsibility to their community during a

[3] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works,* vol. 43, Carl J. Schindler, trans. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1968), 115.

plague. Were Christians obligated to remain in their sphere of influence during the pandemic, or were they at liberty to evacuate and save their lives? The ministers did not receive the rapid response for which they had hoped. Evidence supports the idea that Luther's correspondence was interrupted on more than one occasion. "Luther's handwritten manuscript shows two distinct shifts in the type of paper he used and in his handwriting."[4]

Luther was a typical parish minister, whose life was very hectic. As a University Professor, he was grooming students for life outside the academic setting. He also ministered to the needs of his local community, congregants, and confidants. Like most clergy, Dr. Luther had his share of personal trauma. One of Luther's infant sons had contracted the plague. During the same period, Mrs. Luther was expecting a baby girl, and as we can imagine, there was great concern about shielding her and the unborn baby from being fatalities. Even Martin was suffering from several health issues. "Luther was not inclined to answer immediately, in part because of illness and severe spells of depression which struck him July 6."[5] Luther referred to these afflictions as being "disciplined and scourged" by God.[6] Anna Marie Johnson points out that:

> By this time, he had experienced kidney stones, angina, fainting spells, and buzzing in his ear. On 6 July 1527, Luther had severe circulatory problems and thought he was dying. After that incident, he suffered from headaches that left

[4] Anna Marie Johnson, "Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague, 1527," in *The Annotated Luther, Volume 4: Pastoral Writings* (Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Media, 2016), 387-388, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt19qgg0d.16.

[5] Luther, *Luther's Works,* 116.

[6] Luther, *Luther's Works,* 118.

him unable to read or write for a time. He interpreted all of these ailments as God's disciplining of him, though he does not name specific sins.[7]

Martin Brecht pointed out that "the combination of the psychological and the physical is unmistakable in this illness."[8] To add to his pain, several of Luther's friends succumbed to the plague.[9] During this period, Luther spoke of a friend who came to live with his family. He stated "that Bugenhagen (Pomernus) moved in 'not so much for his sake as for mine …, so he could be a companion in my isolation."[10] So it is clear that the preacher was wrestling with his demons. However, these challenges did not prevent Luther's family from providing home health care for those in their community.

During this hectic period, Hess' initial correspondence arrived in Wittenberg. With all that Martin was attempting to balance in his life, he was delayed in completing his response to the ministers. There is evidence that Luther penned a letter to acknowledge the reception of Hess' correspondence and to explain the procrastination in writing to them.[11]

After two years, Luther finally completes his letter to the clergy in Silesia.[12] At least several events motivated him to complete the correspondence. To begin, "rumors

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[7] Anna Marie Johnson, "Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague, 1527," in *The Annotated Luther, Volume 4: Pastoral Writings* (Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Media, 2016), 391, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt19qgg0d.16.

[8] Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521-1532* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press,1994), 205.

[9] Neil R. Leroux, "Martin Luther as Comforter: Writings on Death," in *Studies in the History of Christian Traditions* (Leiden, NE: Brill, 2007), 224.

[10] Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career, 1521-1530* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1983), 562.

[11] Leroux, "Martin Luther as Comforter," 225.

[12] Leroux, "Martin Luther as Comforter," 225.

that the plague waging near Wittenberg" may have compelled him to finish his letter.[13] Next, Luther heard about a Dominican in Leipzig, who criticized the people of Wittenberg for their handling of the plague. "In the meantime the plague struck Wittenberg, and the people around Luther heard how a Dominican in Leipzig had, early in September, mocked the way the Wittenbergers had run away from the plague. These events stimulated Luther to finish the letter, which was completed not later than the first part of November."[14]

Neil Leroux also states that:

> Fear of plague began to spread in the city. By mid-September (1527); additional deaths to plague began to take their toll on the populace. In response to reports that drunken gravediggers had been rude to grieving family members. Luther spoke out in the pulpit, admonishing listeners to show love for their neighbors. He also rebuked those who left their wives because of the plague.[15]

In addition to the Dominican chastisement and the spread of the plague spreading, Hess sent a follow-up letter to Luther. These issues caused Luther to hasten the completion of his response to the ministers.

The Content of The Letter

According to Neil Leroux, Luther's letter was divided into three parts: the discussion of the pastor's question, the discussion of how to prepare one's soul for death, and the discussion on burial practices.[16] The letter begins by identifying two opinions

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[13] Anna Marie Johnson, "Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague, 1527," in *The Annotated Luther, Volume 4: Pastoral Writings* (Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Media, 2016), 387, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt19qgg0d.16.

[14] Luther, *Luther's Works,* 117.

[15] Leroux, "Martin Luther as Comforter," 224.

[16] Leroux, "Martin Luther as Comforter," 227.

concerning leaving or staying in place. On the one hand, he begins by placing people in two classes: weak or strong faith. He warns that we should not criticize those who have weak faith.

Should anyone stay behind? If so, who should stay behind? Martin Luther acknowledges that humans have been gifted with the freedom of choice. No matter what an individual may feel, Christians should be free to follow their conviction about remaining or leaving. However, Luther is persuaded that at least three groups should remain behind. Leroux separated them into three groups: spiritual, secular, and social.

The first group is the spiritual sect. Ministers belong to this section. According to Luther, this group has a plain command from Christ, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (Jn. 10:11, NRSVUE). "For when people are dying, they must need a spiritual ministry which strengthens and comforts their consciences by word and sacrament and in faith overcomes death."[17]

Next is the secular group. This group includes those who work for the government. According to Romans 13:4, "The governing authorities are God's ministers for your own good." To abandon an entire community that one has been called to govern and to leave without official or government, exposed to all kinds of danger, such as fires, murder, riots, and every imaginable disaster, is a great sin. It is the kind of disaster the devil would like to instigate wherever there is no law and order. St. Paul says, "Anyone who does not provide for his own-family denies the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tm. 5:8).[18]

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[17] Luther, *Luther's Works,* 120.

[18] Luther, *Luther's Works,* 122.

> He offers examples of when we would assist those in fire or who were drowning. Our motive for helping is love for our neighbor. Love will always have risk. If we wait until there are no risk, we will never ever help our neighbors.[19]
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> A man who will not help or support others unless he can do so without affecting his safety or his property will never help his neighbor. He will always reckon with the possibility that doing so will bring some disadvantage and damage, danger, and loss. No neighbor can live alongside another without risk to his safety, property, wife, or child. He must run the risk that fire or some other accident will start in the neighbor's house and destroy him bodily or deprive him of his goods, wife, children, and all he has.[20]
>
> The final group is the social cluster: Master, Servants, Parents and Children, Public Servants and Orphans/Guardians or Friends. According to Luther, Masters and servants have a mutual obligation to care for one another. Families must honor their family members. The Lord Jesus left us an example at the Calvary. He delayed death to ensure that his mother was cared for in his absence (Jn. 19:26-27, NRSVUE). It is interesting to note that Mary was cared for by John the Beloved and not the Lord's siblings. Luther would not have had to emphasize this point if there were no individuals who were failing in their duties. There is one illustration that he mentions, where a spouse abandoned their stricken partner.[21] This is nothing new. Many congregations have members who are cared for by spiritual families rather than their birth families.

Two Definitions of Escaping from Death

Although death is the repercussion of humanity's sins, Dr. Luther did not see it as a sin to escape death. He mentioned several heroes who avoided death by escape, even though some failed to exercise faith in God. Faithful Abraham lied about his relationship with Sarah to spare his life. His grandson Jacob ran from his twin after he had stolen the birthright. David ran from his royal father-in-law and his beloved son Absalom. The great prophet Elijah braved the prophets of Baal and Jezebel, but ran from her threat. Moses fled from the King of Egypt. However, "all of them fled from death when it was possible

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[19] Luther, *Luther's Works,* 125.

[20] Luther, *Luther's Works,* 126.

[21] Leroux, "Martin Luther as Comforter," 224.

and saved their lives, yet without depriving their neighbors of anything but first meeting their obligations toward them."[22] If people escaped other forms of death, why should they not also avoid pestilence?

Second Form of Escape

Luther seemed to view the second form of escape as a sin if a person leaves to save themselves, and no provisions for the care of those sick have been made. In Luther's mind, there appears to be only one reason someone may leave. It was okay to leave if some were left behind to minister to the ailing. In other words, if there were clergy, medical personnel, governmental officials, or even those who would provide for masters and servants, they should feel free to escape.

Luther also warns of some dangers to be cautious during a pandemic! Although Christians serve out of love and faith that God would protect them, they should not serve others presumptuously. Those who act carelessly are warned of the dangers of their actions.

> They are much too rash and reckless, tempting God and disregarding everything which might counteract death and the plague. They disdain the use of medicines; they do not avoid places and persons infected by the plague, but lightheartedly make sport of it and wish to prove how independent they are. They say that it is God's punishment; if he wants to protect them, he can do so without medicines or our carefulness. This is not trusting God but tempting him. God has created medicines and provided us with intelligence to guard and take good care of the body so that we can live in good health.[23]

[22] Luther, *Luther's Works,* 123-124.

[23] Luther, *Luther's Works,* 131.

In addition to taking protective measures, Dr. Luther encouraged the local governments to develop additional medical facilities where the community could receive proper medical care. As we mentioned earlier, there was a shortage of medical facilities in Germany, so members of the community opened their homes to care for their neighbors.

> It would be well, where there is such an efficient government in cities and states, to maintain municipal homes and hospitals staffed with people to take care of the sick so that patients from private homes can be sent there—as was the intent and purpose of our forefathers with so many pious bequests, hospices, hospitals, and infirmaries so that it should not be necessary for every citizen to maintain a hospital in his own home. That would indeed be a fine, commendable, and Christian arrangement to which everyone should offer generous help and contributions, particularly the government. Where there are no such institutions—and they exist in only a few places—we must give hospital care and be nurses for one another in any extremity or risk the loss of salvation and the grace of God. Thus it is written in God's word and command," 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' and in Matthew 7 [:12], 'So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them.[24]

Due to the lack of facilities, people like the Luther family opened their homes to minister to the infected. He suggested a partnership between the community and the government to serve the ailing so that there would be no need for private residential homes to serve as hospitals.

Pandemics and epidemics revealed how unprepared our communities are for a crisis. Just as the plague disclosed the unpreparedness of those in Luther's Day, the pandemic revealed how unprepared the world was for it and the crisis with our Homebound Seniors. How intentionally have our families, churches, communities, and governments been checking on the Seniors and keeping them connected to us?

Luther's letter also offers a stern warning to those who have recovered from the plague. Even though they had recuperated from their illness, they were not to live

[24] Luther, *Luther's Works,* 127.

carelessly. Luther advised them not to expose themselves to those who had previously had the disease. This might expose them to the possibility of suffering a relapse. Neither should they endanger other people's lives by encountering those who had not come down with the plague.

> Moreover, he who has contracted the disease and recovered should keep away from others and not admit them into his presence unless it be necessary. Though one should aid him in his time of need, as previously pointed out, he in turn should, after his recovery, so act toward others that no one becomes unnecessarily endangered on his account and so cause another's death. "Whoever loves danger," says the wise man, "will perish by it" [Eccl. 3:26]. If the people in a city were to show themselves bold in their faith when a neighbor's need so demands, and cautious when no emergency exists, and if everyone would help ward off contagion as best he can, then the death toll would indeed be moderate. But if some are too panicky and desert their neighbors in their plight, and if some are so foolish as not to take precautions but aggravate the contagion, then the devil has a heyday and many will die. On both counts this is a grievous offense to God and to man—here it is tempting God; there it is bringing man into despair. Then the one who flees, the devil will pursue; the one who stays behind, the devil will hold captive so that no one escapes him.[25]

Luther offers an additional frightening warning. It appears that some of the infected citizens were intentionally trying to spread the plague to their uninfected neighbors.

> Some are even worse than that. They keep it secret that they have the disease and go among others in the belief that by contaminating and poisoning others they can rid themselves of the plague and so, recover. With this idea they enter streets and homes, trying to saddle children or servants with the disease and thus save themselves. I certainly believe that this is the devil's doing, who helps turn the wheel of fate to make this happen. I have been told that some are so incredibly vicious that they circulate among people and enter homes because they are sorry that the plague has not reached that far and wish to carry it in, as though it were a prank like putting lice into fur garments or flies into someone's living room. I do not know whether I should believe this; if it is true, I do not know whether we Germans are not really devils instead of human beings. It must be admitted that there are some extremely coarse and wicked people.[26]

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[25] Luther, *Luther's Works,* 132.

[26] Luther, *Luther's Works,* 131-132.

These mentally and physically sick people were a hazard to their communities and themselves. Luther is troubled by this action, and he offers the following recommendation on how the guilty parties should be dealt with. "The devil is never idle. My advice is that if any such persons are discovered, the judge should take them by the ear and turn them over to Master Jack, the hangman, as outright and deliberate murderers. What else are such people but assassins in our town?"[27]

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, we heard the stories of those playing the role of assassins. Some of them know that they are living with infected people. However, they chose to go into the company of others, at the risk of passing on the virus. Parents are sending their exposed children to school. They selfishly endanger other people's lives. I am not suggesting execution, but I believe there should be some legal ramifications for their actions. How can we refer to ourselves as neighbors and endanger others with our actions?

There is also a warning given to those who fear ministering to the sick because they fear being infected with the disease.[28] Martin acknowledges that it is risky to serve our neighbors. However, he suggests that the fear is from the devil. Therefore, he offers a two-fold answer to this predicament. Martin refers to it as two blows against the devil. First, it pleases God to protect us. We know that God can protect us as he has protected others. Although we are not sure of God's will in our situations, we must trust him that everything will ultimately work out.

Next, Luther encourages his readers to claim the promises of God. This is eternal wisdom. In all ages, Christians need to embrace the promises of God's word. God is not

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[27] Luther, *Luther's Works,* 133.

[28] Luther, *Luther's Works,* 128.

slack concerning his promises. We trust that he can deliver, but if the Lord chooses not to, he has another purpose in the plan.

Luther's counsel appears to be holistic in nature. His pamphlet has addressed how to live in a pandemic, but also how one should prepare for death. In this lengthy letter, Luther spent a great deal of time addressing the physical needs of the sick during a Pandemic. However, he does not overlook their spiritual care. Throughout his epistle, he emphasized that we receive God's punishment of death. Therefore, we should be preparing our souls for that day. Knowing that his counsel would be shared with more than the clergy of Silesia, Luther identified three ways that the clergy could assist people in preparing for death.

The doctor's principles are meritorious for all humanity to govern their lives. He points out three ways to prepare for death. First, people should assemble at church and study the word to learn how Christians are to live and die.

> It must be noted that those who are so uncouth and wicked as to despise God's word while they are in good health should be left unattended when they are sick unless they demonstrate their remorse and repentance with great earnestness, tears, and lamentation. A person who wants to live like a heathen or a dog and does not publicly repent should not expect us to administer the sacrament to him or have us count him a Christian. Let him die as he has lived because we shall not throw pearls before swine nor give to dogs what is holy (Mt. 7:6).[29]

Although Luther was concerned about the physical and spiritual care of the afflicted, he warned of the danger of the unrepentant carelessly participating in the sacraments. In 1 Corinthians 11:29, Paul warned about taking communion unworthily and the result of this action. "For all who eat and drink without discerning the body eat and drink judgment against themselves (1 Cor. 11:29, NRSVUE). All humanity is

[29] Luther, *Luther's Works,* 134.

moving towards an appointment with death. No one should take the sacrament without their hearts being properly prepared.

Since the wicked could be our neighbors, we should seek to demonstrate Christian kindness and encourage them to turn their lives over to Christ. This is not because we are better than them, but to aid them in understanding that God loves all of us. He made provisions to save us, but we must be willing to allow Him to transform our lives. If our neighbors see the love of Christ in our actions, they may allow God to transform their lives, too.

Secondly, people are to prepare themselves for death by being in a constant state of obedience.[30] Luther encourages Christians to be reconciled with one another and with their God. They should take the sacraments weekly or every two weeks. A plague ought to cause everyone to live their life soberly and in a state of readiness for death.

Thirdly, clergy should be called while the patients are still alert.

> If someone cannot talk or indicate by a sign that he believes, understands, and desires the sacrament—particularly if he has willfully neglected it—we will not give it to him just anytime he asks for it. We have been commanded not to offer the holy sacrament to unbelievers but rather to believers who can state and confess their faith.[31]

Dr. Luther concludes his letter by sharing burial instructions. "His concern is not with the funeral, burial preparation rites, prayers for the dead, or the state of the dead; his concern is strictly with the burial site."[32] This is pointed out because there was a movement during this time to bury people outside the city wall rather than within the city in the church's cemeteries. This new custom was seemingly connected to the

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[30] Luther, *Luther's Works,* 134.

[31] Luther, *Luther's Works,* 135.

[32] Leroux, "Martin Luther as Comforter," 259.

Reformation Movement. The Reformers were trying to separate themselves from this Catholic tradition. It was viewed as a curse not to be buried in the church's graveyard. This does not seem to be Luther's ultimate concern. His main burden was to slow the spread of the plague. Since there was so little known about the plague, there were questions as to whether, at death, the bodies would release dangerous gases into the air. If that were the case, it might be possible for the dead to transmit the plague to others. Therefore, Luther offered this additional precaution. Those in charge were encouraged to follow the Biblical example and bury the local citizens outside the city limits.

Conclusion

Pandemics, epidemics, and the challenges that accompany them are not unique to the twenty-first century. Dr. Luther's letter afforded us a glimpse into the mind and heart of a traumatized, sixteenth-century clergyman attempting to navigate through a crisis. From a biblical perspective, Luther shares the principles that governed his ministry in traumatic times. For Luther, a crisis did not lessen a person's responsibility to care for their neighbor's needs. He especially identifies several groups within the community who are obligated to remain behind and be of service. Ministers, medical personnel, government officials, servants, masters, parents, and those responsible for the guardianship of orphaned children. He distinguished them as essential workers. They are strongly encouraged to remain in place and meet the penuries of those who are ailing. However, if their faith is weak and they must go, these essential workers are responsible for ensuring that someone remains behind to care for the weak.

Dr. Luther counsels against the perception that it is an act of faithlessness to take protective measures and medication to combat the plague. God has given physicians the wisdom to assist in healing the body. He has also gifted others with the ability to apply natural remedies for restoring the body. However, we can never forget that God is our ultimate healer. People should also be cautious about following unqualified people's suggestions for healing.

The Lessons Learned from Dr. Luther's Letter

What lessons did I gather from Dr. Martin Luther's letter? There are several lessons that I took away from Luther's letter. To begin with, Luther's letter seems to confirm the value of all of humanity. He reaffirms Christ's message in the narrative of the Good Samaritan. Those who are weak are our neighbors, too. Yet, he is a complex person. In other documents, we see a dichotomy in his views. Luther appears to have issues with the Jewish diaspora. In his sermon on "That Jesus Christ Was Born A Jew," he wrote:

> They have dealt with the Jews as if they were dogs rather than human beings; they have done little else than deride them and seize their property. When they baptize them, they show them nothing of Christian doctrine of life, but only subject them to popishness and monkery.[33]

Several years later, Luther's tone changed toward The Jewish People. One author suggested that this change was because of his reading of the works of Margaritha.

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[33] Brooks Schramm and Kirsi I. Stjerna, eds., "That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew (1523)," In *Martin Luther, the Bible, and the Jewish People: A Reader* (Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Media, 2012), 76–83, https://doi.org/10.2307/ j.ctt22nm6gf.13.

Margaritha was a Jew who converted to Christianity.[34] As well as reading the book *Toledot Yeshu* (The History of Jesus), "which contained extremely unflattering stories about Jesus' birth and his secret power."[35] He suggested the following concerning his own people:

> This is what I say, that the more friendly, brotherly, and kindly a Christian treats a Jew, the more the Jew curses the Christian and his faith, mocks, and despises, and thinks to himself, this Christian knows that I am an enemy both to his God and to his faith, and that I curse and despise it.[36]

It alleged that it was out of ignorance that Luther had promoted his former treatment of the Jews.[37] But now that he has additional information, he suggests that "sharp mercy," be practiced toward civil and religious authorities. if the expulsion of the Jews was not acceptable.[38] Civil Authorities' Sharp Mercy was characterized by: 1) Burning down Synagogues; 2) Destroying Jewish Homes; 3) Confiscate Prayer Books and Talmudic Writings; 4) Forbidding Rabbis to teach; 5) Abolish safe conduct for the Jews; 6) Prohibit Usury to the Jews; and Enforce manual labor on the Jews; All but number five applied to pastors and preachers.[39]

The doctor's words are troubling at the least. Religious Liberty is absent. "Sharp Mercy," mirrors religious persecution throughout the ages. Would Luther have acknowledged the value of the Jews and encouraged the clergy to minister their needs?

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[34] Brooks Schramm and Kirsi I. Stjerna, eds., "On the Jews and their Lies," In *Martin Luther, the Bible, and the Jewish People: A Reader* (Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Media, 2012), 165.

[35] Schramm and Stejerna, "On The Jews And Their Lies," 164.

[36] Schramm and Stejerna, "On The Jews And Their Lies," 165.

[37] Schramm and Stejerna, "On The Jews And Their Lies," 165.

[38] Schramm and Stejerna, "On The Jews And Their Lies," 165.

[39] Schramm and Stejerna, "On The Jews And Their Lies," 165.

The story of Dr. Martin Luther demonstrates that God can use imperfect people to achieve His purpose. Homebound Seniors are our neighbors. Although they may not be as strong or active as they once were, we have a responsibility to be attentive to their needs. In their final years, they need to remain connected and engaged with their local congregation.

Next, Luther's letter reminded us that crisis do not excuse us from our responsibility to our fellow humans. Thirdly, being of service also comes with risk. Service does not guarantee that our lives will not be in danger or that we will not suffer death. Fourthly, it is ultimately the individual's decision whether they should stay and serve or prolong their lives by avoiding the virus. God ultimately knows the motives of a person's heart. We have not been charged with encouraging anyone to violate their conscience.

How have these lessons influenced my doctoral project? Although the challenges that Homebound Seniors face are not as drastic as the plague, they are certainly traumatic. Seniors are living longer than ever before, which means our senior population is growing rapidly. To begin with, all humanity has value. Disease, color, social standing, or an individual's age does not diminish the value of a human being's life.

Therefore, the church is responsible for encouraging homebound seniors to use their God-given gifts. This will assist them in continuing to feel valued. There is a slogan in education that references that "no child should be left behind." It implies that everything possible should be done to assist the child in. reaching their full potential in math and reading.[40] I am convinced that the same applies to our Homebound Seniors who

[40] Brian M. Stecher, Georges Vernez, and Paul Steinberg, *Reauthorizing No Child Left Behind: Facts and Recommendations* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010), 1.

are still able to contribute to the ministries of the church. No Homebound Senior should be left behind.

Secondly, even though a person is homebound and out of sight, they should not be absent from the minds of their church family. The church has a responsibility to see to their needs. They need more than food, shelter, and clothing. They need more than us accepting their finances to fund the church. They also need to feel useful.

Thirdly, Luther's letter teaches that being of service comes with risk. Some individuals will misjudge our motives for assisting. They will suggest that we serve because we are trying to receive some benefit from the person. They will not understand that we are simply fulfilling our call to be a good neighbor. However, we acknowledge that everyone's motive is not in the best interest of the Homebound Older Adults.

Fourthly, everyone does not have the gift of working with our aging population. We must be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit toward those gifted in this area so that we do not exasperate the situation. I am so grateful that I was able to be exposed to Dr. Luther's Letter. It has been emotionally draining and exhausting to assist Homebound Seniors transitioning from active service to being isolated from their church families. This letter has encouraged me that my labors have not been in vain.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Like many families, the holiday season is very important to the Osborne/Sackie Family. Nearly thirty years ago, we made an intentional decision that our entire immediate family would spend the Christmas Season together. Several years later, my father-in-love tragically passed away in an automobile accident. This caused us to become more protective of our time with our mothers. During these visits, I took a great interest in the way our mothers interacted with their grandchildren. On one of these occasions, my "Houston, Texas mother" proclaimed to her number one grandson that she was going to live to be one hundred and fourteen years old. This prophecy was very encouraging to me because cancer had already robbed me of my father.

On Wednesday, September 16, 2020, Mom's prophecy was placed in jeopardy. I received an unexpected telephone call from my mother's fellow parishioners. She informed me that my mother had driven to her church to assist with the food distribution, but she did not arrive at her normal time. When she arrived, a couple of the nurses quickly identified the signs of a stroke. A short time later, my cousin was contacted, and she rushed mom to the Houston Methodist Hospital Northwest. After a battery of preliminary tests, the emergency room physician declared that mom not only suffered a stroke, but also a heart attack. Two days later, the cardiologist installed two stents in her

heart and discharged her to a rehabilitation center. For the next three and a half weeks, I wrestled with the uncertainty of how these two major health events would change our future. I also grappled with the reality that mom's aging process was going to be drastically different.

A Theology of Aging

The aging process will affect all of us sooner or later. Our view of it will determine how we will cope with it, as well as our view of others journeying through it. Therefore, we should adopt a theology that influences our view of aging. The following is one definition, which was offered as "A Theology of Aging." "A 'theology of aging' is an understanding of aging in the light of belief in God."[1] I have chosen to view aging through the eyes of God because I am not comfortable with how some humans view the aged. Later in this chapter, I will share an example of one of these uncomfortable views. This Theological Foundations chapter will identify several views of aging, how these views have evolved, identify several biblical themes on aging, and how these themes will influence my doctoral project.

Views of Aging

If humans were honest, the term aging really is not a subject that we like to spend a great deal of time discussing or dwelling upon. The final quarter of our lives can be a very complex time. Helen Oppenheimer describes this period when she states that "the ambiguity of aging is the tension between old age as a time of fruition and decay and of

[1] Canon Stephen Ames, "Finding The Way: A Theology of Aging," *Benetas* (April 2012): 4.

fulfillment and loss."[2] Bernard Nash points out this dual-mindedness of aging when he questions, "Does it strike you as strange that we all want to live longer but none of us wants to grow old?"[3]

Negative Views of Aging

When we were children, we looked forward to aging so that we could participate in activities that adults were involved in. Adults stayed up late. They stayed out late. There were certain conversations that only grown folk could engage in. Grown folk could live where they wanted to live. Adults were seemingly free to make their own choices. They choose their own clothing. They were able to drive and own automobiles. After working for several years, an adult could retire to a time of leisure. As a child, being an adult seemed so attractive. After we finally become adults, there are times when we wish we could return to childhood. Life seemed much simpler in our youth because we did not have to deal with adult issues.

Yet, most times, aging is viewed in a negative light. Consider a few of the less-than-positive views of aging. To begin, the later years are associated with major drastic changes to one's health. For example, I suggested to my mother that she needed to get her ears checked for a hearing aid because the television's volume was too loud. She suggested to me that a hearing aid was for older people.

Secondly, aging is associated with the fear of displacement. What do I mean by displacement? I am referring to an adult reaching a point when they can no longer stay in

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[2] Helen Oppenheimer, "Reflections on the Experience of Aging," in *Aging,* Lisa Sowle Cahill and Dietman Mieth, eds. (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 41-44.

[3] Bernard Nash, "Reworking the Image," *The Witness* 76 (January/February 1993): 11.

their home and must be relocated to another residence. There is a term that I was exposed to several years ago called "aging in place." This refers to a person going through the aging process in their home. Another definition of "aging in place" is "remaining living in the community, with some level of independence, rather than in residential care."[4] Health care providers come to the patient's residence to address their needs. For example, nurses, physical therapists, podiatrists, general physicians, and certified nursing assistants are some of the medical personnel who provide home health care for those who are confined to their residences. Most homebound seniors desire to age in place.

Sad to say, this is not always possible. Being uprooted from one's home can be a traumatic event. Removal from one's home can disrupt an older person's life.

> Moving into the home of a grown child can dramatically increase the dependency of a parent, who more than likely has come from an area where he or she had many longtime friends and belonged to various groups that help define a way of life. Loss of long-standing social contacts means that the older person needs to find new friends and new activities-not always easy to do in the busy younger house-hold and new region. The atmosphere of unfulfilled news and expectations caused by the new situation can be difficult for the younger generation to meet.[5]

Thirdly, aging is also associated with numerous financial concerns. At the end of 2021, I earned enough years to qualify for retirement. I still need five and a half years to be old enough to retire. I have contributed to the Social Security Program since I was seventeen years old. I look forward to collecting my retirement. But the reality is that retirement income is less than that which was earned while one was actively employed in the workforce. While one's retirement income decreases, the cost of living continues to increase. Many retirees will not be able to eliminate all their significant bills before

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[4] Judith A. Davey, Virginia de Joux, Ganesh Nana, and Mathew Arcus, *Accommodation Options for Older People in Aotearoa/New Zealand* (Christchurch, NZ: Centre for Housing Research, 2004), 133.

[5] Melvin A. Kimble and Susan H. McFadden, eds., *Aging, Spirituality, and Religion: A Handbook*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 395.

retiring, like past generations. Some either have no life insurance or are underinsured. Burial arrangements have become so expensive that many have chosen to be cremated. It should also be noted that cremation costs have dramatically increased during the Pandemic. The notion of Affordable Health Care is an oxymoron. The harsh reality is that the retirement years are starting to look very different. Many will be forced to work longer to survive. "An inadequate income has negative effects on health and on the ability of older people to remain active participants in society."[6]

Death is another challenge of aging. The longer people live, the more their loved ones will vanish away.

> Widows and widowers face some common problems. These include not enough time to grieve, a lack of emotional support after from adult children during grieving. Forewarning about a spouse's death may allow a person to work out some grief. Surviving spouses can then plan for the future, and this eases adjustment to widowhood.[7]

M. T. Lysaught points out that: "That aging can so dismantle the constituents of personhood has led Drew Christiansen to identify 'the twin fears' of aging as the fear of dependence and the fear of abandonment and neglect."[8]

No one in their right mind desires to suffer poor health, be displaced, experience financial issues, or lose loved ones. These are only a few of the challenges that older adults will possibly face. When one considers these challenges to aging, it is not very appealing.

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[6] Lianne Dalziel, *The New Zealand Positive Ageing Strategy* (Wellington, NZ: Ministry of Social Policy Design, 2001), 10.

[7] Mark Novak, *Issues in Aging* (New York, NY: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2016), 431.

[8] M. Theresa Lysaught, *Memory, Funerals, and the Communion of Saints: Growing Old and Practices of Remembering,* S. Hauerwas et al., eds. (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University, 2003), 273.

Positive Views of Aging

Rowe and Kahn have offered a strategy for having a more positive view of aging. It is a model for what they describe as successful aging. Successful aging is defined as: "low probability of disease and disease-related disability, high cognitive and physical functional capacity, and engagement with life."[9]

> While this model is helpful to use in health promoting strategies for ageing, it sets those who live with disabilities outside the model. Critique of this model of ageing has included the concept of 'positive spirituality' (Crowther et al . 2002), the authors identifying 'positive' spirituality as the missing component of the model. Even adding positive spirituality to the model fails to produce an embracing holistic model for ageing. Successful ageing is essentially a wellness model of ageing and, as defined, isolates older people with disabilities, physical or mental, outside the model. Thus, viewed from outside the model of successful ageing, health for these people is often only to be considered in relation to medical treatments, not health promotion and well-being. It is contended in this book that well-being is possible and achievable for many older people The not-withstanding their disabilities. What is required is a willingness to look outside the disabilities, to see these people, not assessed according to various scales that would label them as being more or less worthy of care, but as persons, as much so as any other persons, with or without disability. Our responses to persons with disabilities are critical factors in the mix of complexities that surround the worth and value of people who have disabilities. These are the foci of this collection of essays based on issues of ageing, disability and spirituality.[10]

Engaged In Life

This view of aging reminds me of a young, engaged couple who were in their eighties, who requested premarital counseling. They had attained over one hundred years of marital experience between them. I questioned what type of advice I could offer to them. They needed to share some wisdom and understanding with me. I was really a little

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[9] J. Rowe and R. Kahn, "Successful Aging," *The Gerontologist* 37 (1997): 433.

[10] Elizabeth MacKinlay, ed., *Ageing, Disability, and Spirituality: Addressing the Challenge of Disability in Later Life* (Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2008), 11.

shocked when they expressed their desire to get married. Who said that their final years should be companionless? They simply wanted to remain engaged in life.

Active

My Columbus, Ohio, mother is an inspiration. Although she has been officially retired for over a decade, she has remained active. She is a model for "successful aging." Mom is committed to a healthy lifestyle. She eats a balanced diet. She exercises and does Zumba several days a week. She has a burden for aiding children in being successful in their educational pursuits. However, she is also busy training children in learning the Bible. Mom is also a lifelong learner. She is always willing to learn something new. Recently, someone suggested that Mom needed to slow down. She responded, "I can't; I have things to do!"

Mom has embraced the attitude of thinking young. Even though she is nearly four score years, she refuses to think of herself as old. This really came to light when she became a grandmother. Our son was having a conversation with both of his grandmothers. He said to them, "I have two grannies!" His Columbus grandmother strongly disagreed. She said, "You have one granny and one nanna." Charles also strongly disagreed! He declared, "No, I have two grannies!" Our family has continued to laugh at this anecdote. But it summarizes the active mindset of my Columbus Mom. She is not old.

Although the goal is to age successfully, the reality is that aging may conclude differently for each one of us. Some will lose their mind and their mobility, while others suddenly pass away. The uncertain outcome of aging must not cause us to live in

paranoia concerning the future. Neither can we devalue those limited on what they are suffering from diminished abilities. We must view all people through God's eyes.

Lysaught is correct when she points out:

> The joys that attends aging, however, vary from person to person, especially as actual realities of growing old are shaped by personal context, class, gender, and culture. Even within the span of an individual life, one who finds seventy a time of fruition may find eighty-two more ambiguous and adverse.[11]

Theological Themes in the Bible

There are at least three theological themes that stand out in the Bible concerning aging. The first theological theme is all human life is of value**.** Humans are of great worth because they are the work of God's hands (Ps. 8:6, NRSVUE). You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, Genesis 1:26, 27, and 31 state:

> Then God said, "Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humans in his image in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

The Bible records that humanity was intentionally brought into existence. Man and woman were created as a reflection of the image, likeness, and character of God. Women were created as a suitable companion for men (Gn. 2:18). God gifted them with the necessities of this life: housing, provisions, and responsibilities. They were entrusted with the management of planet Earth and the animal kingdom (Gn. 2:15). Adam and Eve

[11] Lysaught, *Memory, Funerals, and the Communion of Saints,* 271-272.

were granted the ability to recreate after their image (Gn. 1:28). At the conclusion of the sixth day of Creation, God declared that his creative work was not good, but very good.

God's love was put to the test when the first humans transgressed his statues. God revealed his love to us when Christ volunteered to be executed in our place (Jn. 3:16). The Creator expects his creation to love and value one another as he does! (Mk. 21:31). God's love for humanity has not been affected by our sins, sex, social status, ethnic heritage, or even our ages. This is demonstrated from Genesis to Revelation. Cain murdered his brother, but God showed mercy to him and would not allow anyone to execute him (Gn. 4:15). The infertile Hannah requested a child to dedicate to the Lord. Her prayer was granted (1 Sm. 1). Elisha interceded for a poor widow's oil jars to continue to reproduce (2 Kgs. 4:1-7). God the Son confirms human value in the New Testament. An aged couple was empowered to conceive a son. John the Baptist would call humanity to repentance and proclaim the Messiah's arrival (Lk. 1). Two seniors testified of Jesus' birth, within the temple (Lk. 2:25-38). Jesus defended and forgave Mary, who was entrapped in a sexual "entanglement" (Jn. 8:11). Jesus Christ delayed death to forgive a thief and assured him that there would be a place for him in paradise (Lk.23:43). The Son of God delayed his death, to ensure his widowed mother's future needs were secured (Jn. 19:26).

It is sad that humans have a low value for their fellow humans. Daily, the evening news reports the tales of Russia senselessly eliminating people in Ukraine. The newspapers disclose that people are randomly murdered because of their ethnic heritage. People are killing their families and themselves, too. Even our seniors are devalued. If sin could not change God's feelings towards us, certainly aging cannot. However, our view

on aging affects the way we see those going through the process. John Swinton illustrates this when he speaks about Peter Singer's views of Dementia patients:

> Dementia is a difficult and painful condition. It is difficult and painful not simply because of the biological consequences of the deterioration of the brain and the relational consequences that this initiates, but also because experiencing such deterioration within a society which is deeply liberal in its political and philosophical assumptions means that dementia is necessarily perceived in deeply negative terms. The liberal worldview venerates a specific set of capacities, values, assumptions and expectations: the primacy of reason, rationality, cognitive ability, independence and the capacity for self-advocacy. Not only are these capacities deemed necessary for entry into the socio-political system, for example through the various social contracts that make up the matrix of society, they are also perceived as vital dimensions of what it means to be a person and to live in a manner which can truly be called human. The loss of intellectual functions such as thinking, remembering, and reasoning takes on a particularly negative set of meanings within liberal culture. Personhood is defined precisely by those aspects of experience that people with dementia lose as their condition progresses.[12]
>
> Australian ethicist Peter Singer. Singer argues, from liberal presuppositions, that the central tenets of personhood reside in the human ability for 'self-awareness, self-control, a sense of the future, a sense of the past, the capacity to relate to others, concern for others, communication and curiosity.'[13]
>
> If Singer's definition is acceptable, it would diminish an individual's personhood.

David E. Richmond mentions an author with this attitude in "A Biblical Perspective On Aging and Old People."

"In a recent article in the NZ (New Zealand) Herald, the aging years were described as the 'long goodnight' and the author wondered why it was not possible to artificially terminate them."[14] It would eliminate infants because they cannot do any of these things, which would give people a license to promote abortion. We love our newborns before they cannot do anything. We do not love them because of what they can

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[12] MacKinlay, *Ageing, Disability, and Spirituality,* 22.

[13] MacKinlay, *Ageing, Disability, and Spirituality,* 25.

[14] David E. Richmond, "A Biblical Perspective On Ageing and Old People," 2, Selwyn Foundation, https://www.selwynfoundation.org.nz/media/2052/a-biblical-perspective-on-ageing-old-people-prof-david-richmond.pdf.

do, but just because. This definition would rob anyone of personhood who has a medical condition or limitation on what they can do.

John Swinton shares the story of a woman named Mary. She was afflicted with Dementia. Daily, she would walk through the halls of her residential facility and would say one word. One day, a nurse began to walk with her and asked her some questions. Why do you just say the one word, God? Are you afraid that you will forget him? She responded, "Yes, Yes!" The nurse reassured the patient that even if she forgot God, he would never forget about her.[15]

There is another group who has a poor view of aging. These people are not necessarily old themselves. The late governor of the state of Colorado expressed his view of those elderly and terminally ill:

> Elderly people who are terminally ill have a 'duty to die and get out of the way' instead of trying to prolong their lives by artificial means, Gov. Richard D. Lamm of Colorado said Tuesday. People who die without having life artificially extended are similar to 'leaves falling off a tree and forming humus for the other plants to grow up,' the Governor told a meeting of the Colorado Health Lawyers Association at St. Joseph's Hospital. 'You've got a duty to die and get out of the way,' said the 48-year-old Governor. 'Let the other society, our kids, build a reasonable life.'[16]

According to this late governor, "terminally ill" age was not a blessing but a burden upon society. They were in the way of their descendants. This troubling attitude caused me to question who has the right to decide who is or is not in the way. Who says that we cannot learn something from someone who is "terminally ill?" Terminally ill seniors have personally educated me on how to live as well as how to die well.

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[15] MacKinlay, *Ageing, Disability, and Spirituality,* 32.

[16] Richard D. Lamm, "Gov. Lamm Asserts Elderly, If Very Ill, Have 'Duty To Die,'" *New York Times,* vol. CXXXIII, Section A, March 29, 1984, 16.

Mary's story really illustrates how important we are to God. Whether we choose to forget about him or whether a disease robs us of our memory of Him, nothing can cause God to forget about us. Paul reminds us of how God feels about us in Romans 8:31-39. The Message:

> So, what do you think? With God on our side like this, how can we lose? If God didn't hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing himself to the worst by sending his own Son, is there anything else he wouldn't gladly and freely do for us? And who would dare tangle with God by messing with one of God's chosen? Who would dare even to point a finger? The One who died for us—who was raised to life for us!—is in the presence of God at this very moment sticking up for us. Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture: They kill us in cold blood because they hate you. We're sitting ducks; they pick us off one by one. None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us. I'm absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely *nothing* can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us (Rom. 8:31-39, MSG).

The following statement affirms how scholars are reaffirming the value of people.

> The term 'humanist gerontology' was introduced to recent research by American scholars such as Moody and Manheimer. It stresses the fact that human activities (including gerontology itself) cannot be understood without taking seriously the different ideals, values, norms and goals that give actions their intelligibility and meaning. This brings to centre stage the practical knowledge that older people cannot be treated as alien by those who write about them. 'Value older people's demands comprehending them as people, not treating them as strangers whose predicaments are foreign to those of others.[17]

> The clear message is: God expects respect of elders regardless of appearance, circumstance, and personality. Even when God was angry with the chosen people, a heavy indictment was charged against Babylon because "You did not show mercy to them, on the aged you made your yoke very heavy" (Is. 47:6). Heavy

[17] Ricca Edmondson and Hans-Joachim von Kondratowitz, *Valuing Older People: A Humanist Approach to Ageing (Ageing and the Lifecourse)* (Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2009), 1.

> judgments are born from God's great compassion for the oppressed, the afflicted, and the needy.[18]

Another theological theme is the blessing of aging. Longevity in the Bible implies that one has God's favor.[19] The fifth commandment promises that if we honor our parents, God will lengthen our days (Ex. 20:12). In 1 Kings 3:14, God promises longevity to Solomon if he follows His ways. Solomon discovered that "Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life" (NRSTVUE).

When I was born, both of my grandfathers had already passed away. I missed having that interaction with my parents' fathers. However, God placed grandfatherly figures in my life to fill the emptiness. My grandfather-in-love, Raymond Murray, was one of these individuals. He was my stepfather's stepfather. He entered my life as I was preparing to leave for college. On May 6, 2022, he turned ninety-nine years of age. Ray has outlived his parents, most of his siblings, two wives, two stepchildren, and a host of friends. When his parents passed away, Ray embraced the role of a caregiver for his siblings. During his adult years, he would also honor his country by enlisting in the Marine Corps. He would fight for a country that did not value him as a human being. Years later, he would be one of the African American Marines that Former President Barack H. Obama honored, who served at Camp Montford Point in Jacksonville, North Carolina.

Grandpa Ray has given back to his local Southside of Chicago community through his Montford Point Marines Organization. These Marines have been instrumental in annually providing toys for the disadvantaged. This same organization has afforded

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[18] Derrel R. Watkins, ed., *Practical Theology for Aging* (New York, NY: Haworth Pastoral Press, 2003), 72.

[19] Erdman B. Palmore, ed., *Encyclopedia of Ageism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), 21.

him to meet National Basketball Stars, Politicians, and even former President Obama. Ray also provided health care for two of his wives before they passed away. Grandpa Ray is not as active as he once was. His dear wife has now become his caregiver. God has blessed him with longevity, because he honored his parents, his country, and his fellow man.

Aging Has Not Been a Blessing For All

Aging has not been a blessing for everyone. We must acknowledge that this final chapter has been very painful for many. It transitions from being a blessing to becoming a burden.

> Aging restricts mobility, diminishes senses, and impairs speech and thinking. It leads to a withdrawal from active public life, and forces us in time to rely on the help of others to carry out the most basic daily activities; the loss, suffering, and diminishment of old age (entail) disengagement, isolation, and dependence.[20]

Some of our seniors are wrestling with loneliness. Their spouses have succumbed to death. Friendships have been broken by death. Others are grieving over their inability to function as they once did. There are also those who lose their ability to engage with their church. Aging has not been viewed as a blessing to many of these individuals.

A third theological biblical theme on aging is to love our neighbors. This principle runs through both the Old and New Testaments. God even gives examples of how to implement this Godly love in Leviticus 19:9-18. In the New Testament, Christ expanded on loving our neighbor through the Parable of the Good Samaritan. He concluded His lesson by declaring that whoever was in need was our neighbor. This love was illustrated in the way that Christ treated people.

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[20] Drew Christiansen, "A Catholic Perspective," In *Aging, Spirituality, and Religion: A Handbook* Melvin A. Kimble, ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1995), 404.

> Moreover, Jesus took care during His short life to associate with the outcasts of society, including those with the most severe psychiatric disorders, many of whom He healed! The Biblical concept that emerges is that there is a nobler way to address the issue of old and disabled folk in society than getting rid of them…According to the Biblical view then, those who seek to follow a Christian spirituality will be seeking to love and nurture those whom society would neglect: not throw them on the scrap heap or euthanize them.[21]

> Social service is the Church's mission to live out the self-giving love of God for the world. 'God is love…We love because he first loved us.' (1 Jn. 4:8 and 19) This theology of ageing is grounded in two New Commandments in the New Testament: to live God and to love our neighbours (Mk. 12:30-31).[22]

The church has a responsibility to love and nurture its members through their various stages of life. Being a Homebound Older Adult does not exempt them from receiving support from the church. This is the church's opportunity to demonstrate the love of God towards them.

A fourth theological theme that runs through the word of God is that the aged still have something to contribute to their community. The aged need to have a purpose. Seniors are looking for meaning in life. They need to be engaged in life. Several years ago, my cousin and I were having a conversation about one of our former principals. He resembled George Jefferson of The Jeffersons Television Show. Although our principal was small in stature, he was a giant among his students and faculty. After serving for over fifty years, he was dismissed from his position. In less than a year of his forced retirement, he passed away. It appears that he had lost his purpose for living.

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[21] David E. Richmond, "A Biblical Perspective On Ageing and Old People," Selwyn Foundation, 2, https://www.selwynfoundation.org.nz/media/2052/a-biblical-perspective-on-ageing-old-people-prof-david-richmond.pdf.

[22] Ji Zhang, "A Theology of Ageing: It's Time to Transform Ageing and Aged Care in Australia," Uniting Care, https://unitingcare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Theology-of-Ageing-25-June-2021.pdfunitingcare.org.au.

In my hypothesis, I pointed out that the Homebound Older Adults experience isolation from their church family. However, they need to be involved in church life.

> Studies have further shown that individuals who regularly nurture their spirituality through religious practices, compared to those who do not, have a lower incidence of high blood pressure, heightened ability to cope with depression, decreased use of hospital services, and healthier immune systems (Mitka, 1998).[23]

> One side effect of loneliness is that much time is spent alone, with little to distract us from thinking about ourselves and our unhappy situation. Finding a way to help someone else is a win-win situation. It distracts from our own problems and allows us to reap the emotional reward that comes from helping someone else (not to mention the added benefit for the person we help).[24]

Even our local communities are looking for ways to combat this isolation.

> The aging services network is also working to help older adults avoid social isolation by designing and testing new ways for them to contribute to society. One example of this approach is a national program called Experience Corps that places older volunteers as tutors in underserved elementary schools. The program provides academic support to students and creates new roles for older adults that are cognitively demanding and socially productive. Moreover, evaluation findings from Experience Corps demonstrated improvements in physical health among the adult participants.[25]

> In the last few years, researchers have been exploring the effects of loneliness on mind and body for people of all ages. The University of Chicago research group led by Cacioppo and Hawkley (2007, 2009, 2010) found that high levels of loneliness can have severe effects on the way we function at any stage in life. As they point out, the discomfort that accompanies the feeling of loneliness likely serves an evolutionary purpose, since survival of the species depends on people's ability to work together. The need to feel connected to others is as vital as our bodies' physical needs. Loneliness is the social equivalent of pain, hunger, and thirst.[26]

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[23] David O. Moberg, *Aging and Spirituality: Spiritual Dimensions of Aging Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* (New York, NY: Taylor and Group, 2001), 103.

[24] Mindy Greenstein and Jimmie Holland, *Lighter As We Go: Virtues, Character, Strengths, and Aging* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2014), 229.

[25] Lynda A. Anderson, et al., "Aging in the United States: Opportunities and Challenges for Public Health," *American Journal of Public Health* 102, no. 3 (2012): 393-395.

[26] Greenstein and Holland, *Lighter As We Go*, 226.

The Bible is filled with narratives of seniors who continued to make active contributions to their community. The Old Testament recounts the story of King David's great-grandmother, Ruth, and her mother-in-law. Ruth was a member of the Moabite race, who married into the Jewish community. Her family of choice's life was filled with trauma. Their country was smitten with a famine, which caused them to relocate. However, the situation did not improve. Within a short period, Ruth's father-in-law, her husband, and her brother-in-law passed away. Ruth returned to the land of Judah with her mother-in-law. Even though her mother-in-love was grieving, Naomi still had something to offer. She shared her faith with her daughters-in-love, and one adopted her faith. Upon her relocation, she shared her wisdom on how to attract a Godly husband. After Ruth's remarriage, Naomi stayed around to be a nanna for Ruth's baby and was able to assist in raising him. Naomi still had something to give.

The Apostle Paul is a New Testament example of an aged saint with a purpose. He experienced a different form of isolation. He was incarcerated. But he did not permit his age, his past failures, his incarceration, nor his thorn in the flesh to prevent him from being useful. He was a spiritual mentor for young disciples. Paul actively worked to prepare his audience for the coming of the Lord through the letters which now make up the New Testament. He even defended his faith before government officials.

On February 6, 2022, I was invited to eulogize one of my pastoral mentors, J. Richard Ellis. For more than thirty years, he was an example of manhood, fatherhood, and pastoral ministry. During his middle years, Pastor Ellis returned to college and earned a bachelor's degree. This resulted in him transitioning from being a hospital administrator to full-time pastoral ministry. After twenty-seven years of pastoral ministry,

he began his transition into retirement. It was during this time that he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. This ailment may have slowed down his body, but it did not slow his mind. Although Pastor Ellis was homebound, he continued to exercise his pastoral gifts. He encouraged his financial clients not to borrow from the bank but from themselves. Another Ellis Rule was not to spend everything in one's pocket but to always keep some money for emergencies.

Those who were discouraged could always find an encouraging word from him. One afternoon, I called to share that God had provided an opportunity for me to return to school. Pastor Ellis was so happy for me. Every time we would talk afterward, he would question me about how my studies were proceeding.

J. R. Ellis was a Bible scholar. Before Google existed, we had Pastor Ellis. He would look up a text if he could locate it from memory. He was also a prayer warrior. He was determined that our telephone conversations would not end without a season of prayer. Through his example, I learned the importance of having a pastoral prayer partner. Pastor J. Richard Ellis was homebound, but he continued to use his talents in service.

Jim was an electrician in his mid-forties who inspected homes. He would assist those who could not afford to pay for his services. By the time Jim reached his seventies, he could no longer do this type of work. So, he began to serve those who needed meals delivered and provide transportation to church. In his eighties, he was now a resident in a skilled-care facility. Although he was homebound in a wheelchair, Jim would counsel his

neighbors. Harold G. Koenig shares this illustration to demonstrate how our talents change as we age.[27]

J. Gordon Harris sums this need up in his phrase, "Productive Roles For The Elderly."[28]

> Though changes occur in the roles of the elderly in ancient cultures, no mandatory ceasing of productive labor is implied. In the Western world, an older person feels compelled to exit from leadership and profitable endeavors. Only in exceptional cases where one owns a business and continues as an entrepreneur will that not happen. Otherwise, a business tells retirees that they are no longer profitable to either self or society.[29]

Richard and Judith Hays were correct when they stated that:

> Consequently, as we grow old, we should seek to discern how to give our lives for others. Old age is not a time simply to relax and play golf, nor is it a time only to reminiscence about the past. (Though relaxation and reminiscence surely have their rightful places in our lives.) Instead, in old age, as throughout our lives, we must continue to pursue the way of service, conforming our own lives to the self-giving pattern of Jesus. This Christological pattern for the years of life challenges and subsets many of the conventional models for aging that we see around us: old people as helpless, useless burdens on society, or old age as a time to sit back and reap the rewards we have earned through a lifetime of work. To understand late life in light of the pattern of a Messiah who died young is to embrace T. S. Eliot's counsel: 'Old men ought to be explorers' with the proviso that the territory we are exploring is the way of discipleship that Jesus has chartered for us.[30]
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> Finally, the older biblical characters signal the possibility of unanticipated fruitfulness in old age: Zechariah and Elizabeth, Abraham and Sarah, and perhaps even Nicodemus in John's story, demonstrate the possibility of change, new life, and the fruition of hopes at the end of the life span. Those who trust in God are not locked into the past-neith into traditional social roles nor into well-worn paths

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[27] Harold G. Koenig, Tracy Lamar, and Betty Lamar, "A Gospel for the Mature Years: Finding Fulfillment by Knowing and Using Your Gifts," in *Haworth Religion and Mental Health* (New York, NY: Haworth Pastoral Press, 1997), 87-88.

[28] J. Gordon Harris, *Biblical Perspectives on Aging: God and the Elderly*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Haworth Pastoral Press, 2008), 154-155.

[29] Harris, *Biblical Perspectives on Aging*, 155.

[30] Stanley Hauerwas, et al., "The Christian Practice of Growing Old," in *Growing Old In Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 13-14.

> chose earlier in life. Rather, they remain open to receive what God desires to give, open to fresh, surprising working of God's Spirit.[31]

Senior Adult situations are constantly changing. Those who are active today may very well be inactive tomorrow. These unexpected changes can cause them and others to adopt the attitude that they are no longer profitable.

> The Christian is commissioned to give testimony throughout the entire life cycle-including retirement, aging, sickness, and death-that God is faithful all the days of our lives. Even though growing old usually includes some painful events, the Christian faith can enable us to live through both the joys and the anguish of aging with confidence and hope.[32]

Those who have adopted this attitude need to be educated that aging can offer an opportunity to expand one's talent portfolio. The church should support them as their new talents expand. This theological study reaffirms the value of humans at all stages of life. Even in biblical times, seniors with challenges contributed to their community. Although adjustments must be made, Homebound Older Adults can find new opportunities to minister.

Conclusion

In conclusion, God has the most balanced perspective on how we are to view aging. All humans are precious in His sight. Aging is to be a blessing to all humans, but it has not been for everyone. All humans have something to contribute to our society. Aged adults are homebound for a variety of reasons. Seniors are confined to their place of residence because they have accepted the responsibility of being a provider for their spouse, siblings, children, grandchildren, or even their friends. Some have been forced to

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[31] Hauerwas et al., *Growing Old in Christ*, 10.

[32] Will Willimon, *Pastoring For Life: Theological Wisdom For Ministering Well* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishers, 2020), 5.

relocate to other areas to receive more support from their family members. Others have experienced major health events that have limited their mobility. However, they have not been mentally impaired. Although they are of service to their loved ones, they still need a means of being involved in the ministries of the church.

As a spiritual leader, I am challenged to lead my congregation in providing an atmosphere where no segment of our church family is left behind. Being restricted to one's home does not diminish one's value as a member of the congregation. Seniors are more than the financial backbone of the church. By re-engaging them in ministry, they will sense that they are also precious in our sight too.

According to the Bible, longevity is a blessing from the Lord. I am unsure how many times I have heard the saying, "God has kept me here for a reason." Although the community may not value their presence, the church needs to find a way to celebrate their longevity. Encouraging our Homebound Older Adults to remain engaged in ministry allows them to do what John Piper has declared: finish life to the glory of Christ.

> So finishing life to the glory of Christ means using whatever strength and eyesight and hearing and mobility and resources we have left to reassure Christ and in that joy to serve people-that is, to seek to bring them with us into the everlasting enjoyment of Christ. Serving people, and not ourselves, as the overflow of treasuring Christ makes Christ look great.[33]

As I mentioned earlier, recently, I eulogized one of my mentors. Even though Pastor Ellis was homebound during his final years, he continued to be actively involved in ministering. He was one of my strongest supporters in entering the Doctor of Ministry Program at United Theological Seminary. I am so grateful that he modeled being an encouragement. He also returned to school later in life. I am attempting to follow in his

[33] John Piper, *Rethinking Retirement* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 9.

footsteps. In this project, I want to encourage Homebound Seniors that God has blessed them to still be around to continue to be a blessing to someone else.

God has gifted all of us with some spiritual gifts and talents. Some Homebound Older Adults may continue to use their giftedness from home. While others need to be educated, there are additional ministry options they can explore. As I mentioned earlier, I have been pastoring for thirty and a half years. Most of my ministry has occurred in the Midwest. The auto industry is central to the economic stability of this section of the United States. From time to time, certain automobile models cease to be profitable. The automakers will make the difficult decision to cease production of this product. Sometimes they choose to create a new model. On other occasions, the automaker will expand the production of a popular model. They shut down the plant and retooled it. That means that they get rid of the former equipment for producing the unproductive model and replace it with equipment to create the new product.

From a spiritual point of view, Homebound Seniors may have to be retooled. They may have to pray that God would give them additional gifts that they did not previously possess. The church may have to assist the senior in identifying talents they may not have recognized in themselves. I learned this by accident. I used to conduct a Bible study for Seniors, in the Senior Residential Facility. Some Tuesday evenings, when I was extremely exhausted or an emergency would arise, I was forced to request that one of the members of the class review the lesson in my absence. The other students seemed very receptive to her teaching in my place. She was grateful that I had invited her to be my backup instructor. After two years, I had become a little bit disappointed. I began to ask God when someone was going to join our church through Bible Study. God did not

answer my question immediately. Within a few months, The Pandemic arrived, and I was locked out of the senior building. My co-teacher said that she was going to conduct an in-apartment Bible Study. Within a few weeks, I called to check on her. She shared that she had a person for baptism. We were so very excited. God was reminding me that even though she was homebound because of COVID-19, she still had something to offer.

Earlier, I shared Jim's story. He was a home inspector who assisted those who could not help themselves. As Jim aged, he retooled himself for his next form of ministry. At different stages of aging, Jim learned how to adapt, retool, and continue to be of service. There are individuals like Jim's who belong to our congregations. They simply do not understand that although they may be limited in how they can serve, it is possible for them to retool and continue to minister.

Barbara Walters once intervened former President Jimmy Carter. Among her questions, she asked him about his life. After retiring from several careers, when were his best years? He responded, "By far my best years are those I'm enjoying now."[34] This very well may be the best years of a Homebound Older Adult's Life. We cannot buy into the propaganda that they have lost their usefulness because they are homebound. It is a sin to witness Homebound Senior Adults, lose their purpose, shrivel up and die. My project will aim to assist them to rediscover their place in ministry.

[34] Jimmy Carter and Times Books (Firm), *The Virtues of Aging* (New York, NY: Ballantine Pub. Group, 1998), XIII.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Aging is not a process we readily embrace. As children, we desire to accelerate the aging process to participate in adult activities. Little girls want to wear makeup, jewelry, certain hairstyles, and clothing that make them appear more mature. Little boys also seek particular clothing, cologne, the chance to smoke, drink, and even drive cars. Each of these represents an individual's achievement of adulthood. Once we reach adulthood, we engage in activities to maintain our youth. We try to behave like youth, dress in youthful styles, invest resources in plastic surgery and injectables, and even spend time with those who are younger. This is an attempt to reverse the aging process and restore our youth. Why? Because there are many negative perceptions of aging. Our views on aging will influence how successfully we cope with the process. They will also shape how we treat those who are experiencing it. To gain a balanced perspective on aging, I have chosen to examine it through the Sociology of Aging. What does the phrase "the Sociology of Aging" mean? The Sociology Guide offers the following definition of this term: "Ageing can be sociologically defined as the combination of biological, psychological and social processes that affect people as they grow older."[1]

[1] Sociology Guide, "A Student's Guide To Sociology," Sociologyguide.com, https://www.sociologyguide.com/ageing/index.php.

This definition suggests that numerous factors affect the aging process. As we age, we endure biological changes both internally and externally.

> Biological changes certainly occur as we age. The first signs are probably in our appearance. Our hair begins to turn gray, our (male) hairlines recede, and a few wrinkles set in. The internal changes that often accompany aging are more consequential, among them being that (a) fat replaces lean body mass, and many people gain weight; (b) bone and muscle loss occurs; (c) lungs lose their ability to take in air, and our respiratory efficiency declines; (d) the functions of the cardiovascular and renal (kidney) systems decline; (e) the number of brain cells declines, as does brain mass overall; and (f) vision and hearing decline.[2]

> Aging causes psychological changes within our bodies.

> Cognitive and psychological changes also occur. Learning and memory begin declining after people reach their 70s; depression and other mental/emotional disorders can set in; and dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, can occur. All of these conditions yield statistics such as follows: about half of people 65 or older have arthritis or high blood pressure; almost one-fifth have coronary heart disease; more than one-fifth have diabetes; and about 60% of women in their 70s have osteoporosis.[3]

There are also sociological changes that occur. Gerontologists, those who study aging, view aging in the following manner:

> Gerontologists say that age and aging have at least four dimensions. The dimension most of us think of is chronological age, defined as the number of years since someone was born. A second dimension is biological aging, which refers to the physical changes that "slow us down" as we get into our middle and older years. For example, our arteries might clog up, or problems with our lungs might make it more difficult for us to breathe. A third dimension, psychological aging, refers to the psychological changes, including those involving mental functioning and personality, that occur as we age. Gerontologists emphasize that chronological age is not always the same thing as biological or psychological age. Some people who are 65, for example, can look and act much younger than some who are 50. The fourth dimension of aging is social. Social aging refers to changes in a person's roles and relationships, both within their networks of relatives and friends and in formal organizations such as the workplace and houses of worship. Although social aging can differ from one individual to

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[2] Barkan, "Sociology," 12.5.

[3] Barkan, "Sociology," 12.5.

> another, it is also profoundly influenced by the *perception* of aging that is part of a society's culture.[4]

Each of these dimensions or phases is important. They are interconnected when we define the aging process. It is social aging that will ultimately affect my project. Homebound Seniors suffer when their roles change because of aging. Since the elders are restricted from the activities they were once involved in, they need additional means of remaining active.

The Sociology of Aging contains three theories. The following chart identifies them and the major assumptions attached to them.

Table 12.1 Theory Snapshot

Theoretical Perspective	**Major Assumptions**
Disengagement Theory	To enable younger people to assume important roles, a society must encourage its older people to disengage from their previous roles and to take on roles more appropriate to their physical and mental decline. This theory is considered a functionalist explanation of the aging process.
Activity Theory	Older people benefit themselves and their society if they continue to be active. Their positive perceptions of the aging process are crucial for their ability to remain active. This theory is considered an interactionist explanation of the aging process.

[4] Barkan, "Sociology," 12.1.

Theoretical Perspective	Major Assumptions
Conflict Theory	Older people experience age-based prejudice and discrimination. Inequalities among the aged exist along the lines of gender, race/ethnicity, and social class. This theory falls into the more general conflict theory of society.[5]

The second theory, Activity, most closely relates to my Doctor of Ministry project. I have witnessed seniors whose lives have deteriorated because they have not remained active. For example, my mother's eldest brother was a hardworking and active individual. After his wife passed away, he seemed to give up. Uncle Willie lost interest in his hobbies of working on automobiles and barbecuing. Soon after my aunt's death, my healthy uncle was diagnosed with dementia. Within a few years, he passed away.

On the other hand, my mother-in-love is a poster child for aging successfully. She is approaching her eighth decade of life. Sitting still is not in her vocabulary. Mom is a retired educator, and although she has been retired for over twelve years, she continues to substitute teach at a local private school. Recently, someone suggested that she needed to slow down. Nana responded, "I can't! I have too much to do!" She thinks young, acts young, exercises, and interacts with young people. Mom does her best to maintain an active lifestyle.

My doctoral project focuses on a subgroup of older adults. It is concerned about seniors who are homebound for various reasons. In my context, some are homebound because they serve as caretakers for spouses, children, grandchildren, siblings, and

[5] Barkan, "Sociology," 12.5.

friends. Other older adults are confined to their residences due to their own health issues, while others have become isolated because of a lack of transportation. Although their confinement can prevent them from being as active as they once were, it does not mean that many of them cannot be functional and productive. In this chapter, I will share how the Activity Theory of the Sociology of Aging confirms that homebound seniors who can still engage need to remain busy. We will also explore the possible consequences if they do not stay active. I will employ the Integration Scientific Model to demonstrate how science and religion can identify and address a problem.

The word aging is not a popular term, nor is it easy to understand. There are numerous elements to account for when we refer to aging. From a sociological perspective, it is "defined as the combination of biological, psychological and social processes that affect people, as they grow older."[6] Within the field of The Sociology of Aging there have been three major theories: Disengagement, Activity, and Conflict. Of the three, Disengagement and Activity seem to be the ones that are most widely spoken about. Jessica Diggs points out how disengagement and activity theories are often contrasted with each other.

> Proposed by Cummings and Henry in 1961, disengagement theory describes social disengagement as an adaptive response to aging in which elderly persons relinquish roles while maintaining a sense of self-worth. This voluntary surrender of activities is thought to permit the orderly transfer of power from older to younger generations and is beneficial for both the aging individual and society. Activity theory was introduced by Havighurst and colleagues in 1961 and is rooted in symbolic interactionist theory. According to symbolic interactionism, a person's identity or self-concept is defined in part by interactions with others and in part by the environment. These interactions can impact on behavior, thought patterns, and the aging process. In their statement of activity theory, Havighurst and colleagues assert that older individuals have the same psychological and social needs as middle-aged people and that the social withdrawal that

[6] Sociology Guide, "A Student's Guide To Sociology," Sociologyguide.com, https://www.sociologyguide.com/ageing/index.php.

> characterizes old age is contrary to the needs of the aging individual. When social withdrawal or role loss occurs, whether by retirement, widowhood, or loss of ability to participate in past activities, the aging person may experience a loss of personal identity and well-being, low-self-esteem, shame, or isolation.[7]

The Disengagement Theory suggests that as elders move into retirement, they are ready to relinquish their former roles and are no longer able to carry them out effectively. Yet we see numerous seniors who are more than capable of successfully executing their jobs.

There are also criticisms of the Activity Theory.

> (Criticism of Activity Theory) One criticism of activity theory is that its appraisal of the ability of the elderly to maintain their level of activity is too optimistic: although some elders can remain active, others cannot. Another criticism is that activity theory is too much of an individualistic approach, as it overlooks the barriers many societies place to successful aging. Some elders are less able to remain active because of their poverty, gender, and social class, as these and other structural conditions may adversely affect their physical and mental health. Activity theory overlooks these conditions.[8]

I respect the criticisms that are pointed out above. We cannot make blanket assumptions about any group. It appears that the Activity Theory can be limited to those who are physically active. I am challenging this view. I am suggesting that for some, there are other ways that they can be active. Some Homebound Seniors are mentally alert. They are mentally active. Their mobility may be limited, but they are mentally alert. We have an opportunity to keep this group engaged. If we can encourage seniors to remain engaged, do we do the same for Homebound Seniors, too?

How does Activity Theory engage with my biblical, theological, and historical foundation chapters? To begin, the Biblical Foundations Chapter examines the seventy-

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[7] Sana Loue and Martha Sajatovic, *Encyclopedia of Aging and Public Health* (New York, NY: Springer, 2008), 79–81.

[8] Barkan, "Sociology," 12.3.

first division of Psalms. It records the prayer of the psalmist David. Over twenty-four verses, he petitions and praises God. According to his petitions, King David wrestles with the trauma of being stalked by his enemies. In this threefold psalm, he makes a dual request. First, David asks that God deliver him from his enemies who scandalize God's name and his name too. According to Psalms 7:10 and 11 (NLT), "For my enemies are whispering against me. They are plotting together to kill me. They say, 'God has abandoned him. Let's go and get him, for no one will help now.'"

Who does not want to be liberated from their enemies? Who does not desire to be vindicated of the falsehoods that our enemies are perpetrating against us? David has an additional request: he is petitioning God not to abandon him in his later years. According to verse nine, it states, "And now, in my old age, don't set me aside. Don't abandon me when my strength is failing." No one would argue against feelings of loneliness and being forsaken, no matter what age they are. This burden weighs so heavily on his heart that David repeats it nine verses later. Verse eighteen says, "Now that I am old and gray, do not abandon me, O God. Let me proclaim your power to this new generation, your mighty miracles to all who come after me."

David expresses a concern that many Homebound Seniors possess. They do not want to be abandoned or isolated. As a soldier, he had been isolated while he was on combat missions. As a fugitive, he experienced isolation while being hunted by his mentally disturbed father-in-law. As a king, David was isolated while escaping his overly ambitious son, Absalom. In his final years, he does not want to suffer isolation again.

In verse nineteen, David seems to have another motivation for being rescued. He requested God's deliverance so that he would be permitted to witness to another

generation. In his own way, David was declaring that even at this point in his life, he could be useful. He may not have been able to play the harp like he once could, but he could still testify about God's goodness. The warrior may have been too old to swing a sword or a sling on the battlefield, but he could articulate the lessons that he learned. For example, he could share that even in his lonely moments, he had found consolation in God being a "refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1). In other words, David was declaring that although he was in the final quarter of his life, he was not washed up yet. The son of Jessie was not ready to retire. He still had something to offer to God. The shepherd had some additional wisdom to share with his flock. Although he was a senior, he was still able to be productive. He still had a purpose.

Many Homebound Seniors desire to be actively engaged in life. They want to do more than return their tithes and offerings. It is not enough for them to be informed about what is happening at their church; they want to be involved in the life of the church. Many seniors would embrace the opportunity to mentor others and would love to pass down the wisdom they have gathered over the years. These seniors cherish sharing how God has directed their path.

In the Historical Foundations Chapter, I reviewed a letter that was written in 1527. It was penned during the period when the Black Plague, or the Bubonic Plague, was attacking Europe. A group of European Ministers wrestled with their responsibility to their plague-infected community. Were they at liberty to leave, or should they remain in place and minister? Between 1525 and 1527, two letters were sent to Dr. Martin Luther to seek his counsel. He appears to have been delayed in completing his response to the clergy because he had a variety of challenges going on in his life. After the spread of the

plague in Wittenberg, a Dominican priest was criticized for the way the city of Wittenberg was managing the plague.[9] After learning of the mistreatment of a grieving family by grave diggers, he finally completed his letter.[10]

In the correspondence, Luther points out that all are free to exercise their power of choice in their responsibility. Yet he identifies three groups who he believed had a biblical obligation to remain in place. These groups were the spiritual sect (ministers), secular sect (governmental officials and medical personnel, and the social sect (masters, servants, parents, children, and public servants). Although people were free to make their own choices, Martin viewed it as sin if they escaped to save themselves and did not ensure that some capable individuals remained behind to care for the sick.

So, how does this Historical Foundation Chapter connect to the Activities Theory? It is connected because those with the plague were the vulnerable members of the Wittenberg Community. If they were not cared for by those whom Luther had called out, then these vulnerable individuals would be left behind. They would be left uncared for. Many of them were probably the aged members of the community.

Our senior population continues to be one of the most vulnerable segments of our nation. Their safety is endangered. Their finances are threatened. Their health is at risk. Our elders' well-being is in jeopardy. As in the 1500s, the church body are essential workers. We are obligated to cherish and honor older members of the community. One of the ways that we can honor them is by assisting them to remain active, especially those who are homebound.

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[9] Luther, *Luther's Works,* 117.

[10] Leroux, "Martin Luther as Comforter," 224.

My theological foundation chapter examined the Theology of Aging. According to Dr. Ames, "A 'theology of ageing' is an understanding of aging in the light of belief in God."[11] I have chosen to embrace God's view of aging, because I am uncomfortable with the way that many human beings look at growing older. From my study of the Bible, four theological themes stood out to me. To begin, all human life is valuable to God. We are the work of God's hands (Ps. 8:6). Our Heavenly Father is in love with us (Jn. 3:16). Our sins, sex, social status, ethnic heritage, health, or our ages do not alter God's feelings towards us. A human is not less of a person because they are in poor health.

Another theological theme is the blessing of longevity. Throughout the Bible, living a long life implies God's special favor.[12] In Kings 3:14, God promises longevity to King Solomon if he follows His ways. The Bible also points out that for those who dishonored their parents, days were cut short (Ex. 20:12), which seems to suggest that if we do not do right by our elders, then we will have an answer to God.

The third theological theme that revealed itself was our responsibility to love our neighbor. According to Luke 10:25-37, whoever is in need is our neighbor. Those who are Homebound Seniors would qualify as needed.

It is my final theological theme that connects to the Activity Theory. Older Adults continue to have something to contribute. Pastoring in the Seventh-day Adventist Church has resulted in my living away from home for most of my adult life. This has resulted in my mother and me talking daily on the telephone. Prior to her stroke, I would call and ask how she was doing. Her response would be, "I am praying that the Lord will keep me in

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[11] Canon Stephen Ames, "Finding The Way: A Theology of Aging," *Benetas* (April 2012): 4.

[12] Palmore, *Encyclopedia of Ageism*, 21.

my right mind." Mom did not want to lose her cognitive skills. Yet her stroke and heart attack began her decline. These concerns are legitimate challenges for all older adults.

Yet the Bible is full of examples of seniors who remained active, in some fashion, in their later years. Naomi served as a nurse, nanny, and nurturer to Ruth's son Obed (Ru. 4:14-16). In Luke's Gospel, a senior pastoral couple with fertility issues was entrusted with birthing and raising the forerunner of the promised Messiah (Lk. 1:5-25). In the following chapter, two senior citizens' prayers were answered. They were privileged to see, announce, and celebrate the Messiah's birth (Lk. 2:33-38).

On February 6, 2022, I funeralized one of my pastoral mentors, J. Richard Ellis. For over thirty years, he was an example of manhood, fatherhood, and a compassionate shepherd. After twenty-seven years of pastoral ministry, he slowly transitioned into retirement. It was during this time that he was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. Although his body began to deteriorate, he demonstrated that he still had something to contribute to his faith community. From his northwest Oklahoma City home, he would encourage the discouraged, offer financial advice, provide marital counsel, and pray for those who needed a prayer partner. His life was prolonged because he continued to actively minister.

The goal for all seniors should be to age successfully. What does it mean to age successfully? Rowe and Kahn have defined "successful ageing" as "low probability of disease and disease-related disability, high cognitive and physical functional capacity, and engagement with life."[13] Although not every senior will be in optimal mental and physical health in their final years, many can remain engaged in life. Being active is not limited to one's ability to be mobile.

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[13] J. Rowe and R. Kahn, "Successful Ageing," *The Gerontologist* 37 (1997): 433.

Is there a negative side for Homebound Seniors not being active? Yes, there is! Homebound older adults suffer when their roles have changed because of aging. Because they are restricted in their ability to get out of their residence, they become subjected to social isolation. The National Health Service defines social isolation as "the lack of social contact or support."[14]

> According to the University of California at San Francisco, lonely seniors experience a 59% increased risk of physical and mental health incidents compared to their connected counterparts. Social isolation significantly increases the risk of premature death from all causes, with risks comparable to smoking, obesity, and physically inactivity, especially among older adults. Loneliness and social isolation have been associated with approximately a 50% increased risk of dementia, a 29% increased risk of heart disease, and a 32% increased risk of stroke. The impact of social isolation goes beyond physical health. It can lead to a decline in cognitive function, increased rates of depression and anxiety, and a higher risk of developing chronic health conditions for seniors…Additionally, social isolation can contribute to a diminished sense of purpose and overall life satisfaction. Estimates from the National Health and Aging Trends Study suggest that approximately 2 million older adults are homebound, and about 1 in 4 older adults are socially isolated. Social isolation is considered a "chronically stressful condition" that accelerates aging. Homebound status is characterized by the inability to move beyond the home environment and the need for assistive devices or assistance from others to leave home. The consequences of social isolation among homebound seniors are significant. It can lead to a decline in physical health, mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, and an increased risk of developing chronic conditions. Social participation, which involves involvement in interpersonal interactions outside the home, is closely related to loneliness and social isolation. Reduced social participation in older adults is associated with similar negative health outcomes as loneliness, and intervention to increase social participation may lead to reductions in loneliness.[15]

There are benefits for Older Adults remaining active. For example, community organizations have recognized the mutual advantages of older adults remaining active. It benefits seniors as well as the members of their local community.

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[14] Abraham Ibn Ezra, "Interventions for Loneliness And Social Isolation National Institute For Health Research." The University of York Centre for Reviews and Dissemination, 2014.

[15] Ultimate Care, "Socialization for Homebound Seniors," Ultimate Care, https://www.ultimatecareny.com/resources/socialization-for-homebound-seniors.

> The aging services network is also working to help older adults avoid social isolation by designing and testing new ways for them to contribute to society. One example of this approach is a national program called Experience Corps that place older volunteers as tutors in underserved elementary schools. The program provides academic support to students and creates new roles for older adults that are cognitively demanding and socially productive. Moreover, evaluation findings from Experience Corps demonstrated improvements in physical health among the adult participants.[16]

> A second step for successful aging suggested by scholarly research is religious involvement (Barkan & Greenwood, 2003; Moberg, 2008). Religious involvement enhances psychological well-being among older adults for at least two reasons. As people worship in a congregation, they interact with other congregants and, as just noted, enhance their social support networks. Moreover, as they practice their religious faith, they reduce their stress and can cope better with personal troubles. For both these reasons, attendance at religious services and the practice of prayer are thought to enhance psychological well-being among the elderly. Some elders cannot attend religious services regularly because they have health problems or are no longer able to drive a car. But prayer and other private devotional activities remain significant for many of them. To the extent that religion makes a difference for elders' well-being, health-care facilities and congregations should do what they can to enable older adults to attend religious services and to otherwise practice their religious faith."[17]

> Moreover, they (the church) have historically been the institution concerned with sponsoring services that address the needs of elders in the community, including housing, leisure activities, volunteer services and health care needs. Indeed, the benefits may be reciprocal, where elders provide a resource to churches through volunteering their services. Churches may benefit from the services offered, as well as providing a pathway for older adults to engage in service opportunities. Such opportunities promote support and solidarity.[18]

Finally, the purpose of keeping Homebound Seniors active is not simply to occupy them with activities. It is necessary for them to engage in pursuits that are meaningful and rewarding. A senior's participation in an activity should have a clear purpose.

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[16] Lynda A. Anderson, "Aging in the United States: Opportunities and Challenges for Public Health," *American Journal of Public Health* 102, no. 3 (2012): 393-395.

[17] Barkan, "Sociology," 12.5.

[18] Judith Phillips, Kristine J. Ajrouch, and Sarah Hillcoat-Nallétamby, "Religion/Spirituality," in *Key Concepts in Social Gerontology* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publishers, 2010), 182-185.

> However, your goal shouldn't be to just keep busy. You want to take part in activities that are meaningful to you-that engage your mind, body and soul and motivate you to get up every morning-in other worlds, activities that are purposeful. Purpose is important. Having a sense of purpose helps instill optimism and keeps you from looking back on your life and saying 'what happened? As Mark Twain observed, you'll have regrets and remorse for the things you didn't do rather than for what you did.[19]

Dr. Mark Hyman mentions ten suggestions to assist seniors in discovering their purpose: develop a growth mindset; create a vision statement; practice altruism and serving others; transform your struggles and pain into purpose; connect to a community; connect with friends or colleagues who inspire you; cultivate your mind by reading; learn to love and be kind to yourself; and take time for self-care.[20]

Conclusion

In conclusion, humans view aging differently. Gerontologists separate aging into four dimensions: chronological, biological, psychological, and social. When we examine people's perceptions of aging, many get stuck in the biological and psychological dimensions. They focus on the physical changes and decline that the body will probably experience. Even though they may experience these changes, aging does not devalue an individual. These changes are not a reason to discard them. It is not a reason to view them as a burden. If Homebound Older Adults are not mentally alert and mobile, many have little use for them. Science, as well as religion, has confirmed that it is beneficial to have older adults with us. That leads us to the fourth dimension of ages, which is known as social age. This is the phrase where their role changes. They may no longer be able to

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[19] Nathan K. LeBrasseur and Christina Chen, *Mayo Clinic on Healthy Aging* (Rochester, NY: Mayo Clinic Press, 2024), 205.

[20] Mark Hyman, *Young Forever: The Secrets To Living Your Longest, Healthiest Life* (New York, NY: Little Brown Spark, 2023), 249-250.

perform certain activities that they once did. Yet, many can remain productive in another role. They may have to follow the example of the auto industry and retool themselves.

These Older Adults should be encouraged to follow the example of Jim. In his forties, he was a home inspector. Jim assisted those who could not afford his service. By the time he reached his seventies, Jim was no longer able to inspect homes. So, Jim retooled himself and delivered meals to Homebound Seniors. In his eighties, Jim used a wheelchair and lived in a nursing home. Again, he retooled himself. He rolled about the nursing home and encouraged his fellow residents. Many homebound elders still have something to offer. It is obvious that remaining active was beneficial to Jim and his neighbors.[21] Elder's contributions to our churches and our community benefit us as well as themselves. They can pass on their experience and wisdom as well as have a renewed purpose for living.

According to the World Health Organization, "Intergenerational opportunities enrich the experience for all ages. Older people pass on traditional practices and knowledge and experience, while younger people offer information about newer practices and help older people navigate in a rapidly changing society."[22] Even those who are confined to their place of residence may remain active. They may not be out and about, but like Pastor J. R. Ellis, they can minister from their homes. Several years ago, The AARP Magazine published an article by Bill Newcott entitled "Wisdom of the Elders." In this article, he highlighted several elders who were actively engaged in life.

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[21] Koenig, Lamar, and Lamar, "A Gospel for the Mature Years," 87-88.

[22] World Health Organization, *Global Age-Friendly Cities: Guide* (Geneva, CH: World Health Organization, 2007), 43.

A sixty-six-year-old educator by the name of John Ammon created a program to assist Native American children in San Jose, California. The youth sensed that their tutors wanted them to succeed. He also mentioned nurse Natalie Casey. This eighty-two-year-young nurse found great satisfaction in encouraging her patients. Included in this article was the story of Assistant Fire Chief John Freutel of Minneapolis. This hero assisted in saving citizens when a Mississippi Bridge collapsed.[28]

Each of these seniors ' skills benefited others. Ultimately, if we do not encourage our elders to remain active and engaged, then we risk them becoming isolated.

> The Delray Beach Public Library Newsletter identified the following five mental and physical health benefits of volunteering: "1. Volunteering decreases the risk of depression by increasing social interaction and helping form a support system. 2. Volunteering provides a sense of purpose and fulfillment. 3. Volunteering keeps one physically and mentally active by getting you up and moving while helping others. 4. Volunteering can reduce stress levels and help you appreciate what you have. 5. Volunteering contributes enormously to "The Happiness"—Studies show that the more you volunteer, the happier you are![23]

If Homebound Seniors become isolated, they may experience other repercussions. H. Michael Zal points out that there are physical, emotional, and cognitive advantages to remaining active. He reiterates the long-term effects of being physically active. Dr. Zal reaffirms that "Thirty minutes of moderate exercise daily can make you feel good but can also improve your overall bodily health and resistance to disease. This may mean anything from a regular gym routine to water aerobics or swimming, yoga, or dance classes, or simply taking a walk."[24]

There are also emotional benefits. Zal continues by stating that "Being active also pays emotional dividends. Exercise releases chemicals in your brain, called endorphins,

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[23] Delray Beach Public Library, "Volunteer Opportunities," Delray Library. http://www.delraylibrary.org/?page_id=44.

[24] Zal, *A Psychiatrist's Guide,* 169.

which make you feel good. Feeling better mentally will improve your quality of life. Exercise can relieve stress and is one of the best treatments for relieving anxiety."[25]

Cognitively, he points out how physical activity affects the brain:

> Remaining physically active significantly reduces the risk for cognitive decline, dementia, and Alzheimer's disease. It keeps thinking, learning, and judgment skills sharp. Dr. Joe Verghese, of Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, found in a 2003 study that regular leisure activity resulted in a low risk of dementia. He surmised that cognitive activity may work against the onset of dementia by increasing a person's "cognitive reserve," strengthening the connections between brain cells, or encouraging new networks within the brain.[26]

> Both social isolation and loneliness are associated with increased mortality, but it is uncertain whether their effects are independent or whether loneliness represents the emotional pathway through which social isolation impairs health…Social relationships are central to human well-being and are critically involved in the maintenance of health. Social isolation is an objective and quantifiable reflection of reduced social network size and paucity of social contact. It is a particular problem at older ages, when decreasing economic resources, mobility impairment, and the death of contemporaries conspire to limit social contacts. Socially isolated individuals are at increased risk for the development of cardiovascular disease, infectious illness, cognitive deterioration, and mortality. Social isolation also has been associated with elevated blood pressure, C-reactive protein, and fibrinogen and with heightened inflammatory and metabolic responses to stress.[27]

> Isolation is the antithesis of contentment. Getting involved in the world is one of the best ways to reduce isolation. The key to a successful life, overall, and retirement and late life in particular, is to stay involved and maintain a passion for work, hobbies, and other projects. Take charge of your life and don't ever be without a goal. Everyone needs something to look forward to that can motivate them to action when they get up in the morning.[28]

By encouraging and empowering our Homebound Seniors to remain active, we can help them overcome the effects of isolation. They can discover a new purpose for

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[25] Zal, *A Psychiatrist's Guide,* 169.

[26] Zal, *A Psychiatrist's Guide,* 170.

[27] Andrew Steptoe, Aparna Shankar, Panayotes Demakakos and Jane Wardle, "Social Isolation, Loneliness, and All-Cause Mortality in Older Men and Women," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 110, no. 15 (2013).

[28] Zal, *A Psychiatrist's Guide,* 184.

living. Elders can be reminded that their community and church not only value them but also need them. We need to support older adults to give back what has been given to them.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

Like most United Theological Seminary doctoral students, I enrolled in the program with an idea of the challenge I would tackle. After nearly thirty years of pastoral ministry, I wanted to develop a tool to assist in retaining new members in the Church. But the focus shifted after my Spiritual Autobiography and Synergy Chapters were completed. With the guidance of one of my mentors, Dr. Rudy Rasmus, I learned that God created within me an affinity for older adults and a heart for their needs.

As an early teen, two of the most important adults in my life, faced significant health challenges. My maternal grandmother, who took care of me while my parents worked, needed someone to care for her. Our family shared the responsibilities, so Granny would not have to be placed in a Health Care Institution. I was honored to volunteer to stay a few nights a week to allow my mother to go home and rest.

When Granny passed in September of 1978, my father's cancer was diagnosed as terminal. This diagnosis dramatically altered all our lives. Pops courageously decided to take medical retirement, then chose to move into his sister's home and employ a former neighbor to be his caregiver. It was during the last eight months of his life that I watched my strong father deteriorate. He lost weight, his ability to walk, and his ability to care for

his personal needs. One January evening, he asked me to assist him in shaving. I had not even reached the age to shave myself, but I was once again grateful for the opportunity to be of assistance in those final months of my daddy's life.

Forty-one years later, it was now my mother's turn. The strongest and healthiest person in our family suffered a heart attack and stroke. As an only child, it was my responsibility to travel to Houston, Texas, and assess her condition. My wife and I decided that Mom would be relocated to reside in our home. It was now my responsibility to be of service. My family and I gladly accepted our new role of advocate, caregiver, chauffeur, business manager, and more.

This doctoral project was born while I was navigating through this new normal. Previously, I had assisted with my grandmother and father's care. Now I was carrying the load. My mother had now become The Homebound Older Adult. But she was not content to merely be at home. She longed to be connected and involved in the life of the church. It was while she was convalescing that my mother found her own means to minister. She retaught herself to crochet. As a part of her recovery, Mom made Afghan blankets for the members of the St. Louis Berean Seventh-day Adventist Church. This activity gave her a sense of contribution to the life of the church.

Myrtle Osborne Beasely's narrative illustrates that many Homebound Senior Adults continue to have the desire and the ability to contribute to the ministries of their local congregations, despite their health challenges. Similarly, many of the homebound older members of the St. Louis Berean Seventh-day Adventist Church are passionately interested in remaining connected to the church through service. The information gathered in this project will share their passion for remaining engaged.

My mother's aging journey illustrates and brings awareness to the fact that many Homebound Senior Adults not only desire but are willing to minister, despite their present circumstances. These limitations leave them vulnerable to social isolation and decreased connection with their communities.

According to Ankuda's 2020 report, 13% of adults are homebound in the United States, and many Homebound Older Adults experience reduced contact with their communities and church, once they are no longer able to attend services regularly.[1] Over time, phone calls and visits from their church family members often decrease. In some cases, church family members may remain more attentive to them than the person's own family members. However, there are also instances when the church is unable to maintain consistent engagement. As communication lessens, Homebound Seniors may become increasingly disconnected from their church community, resulting in limited access to discipleship opportunities as they age.

I witnessed firsthand how the lack of in-person worship and activities can lead to loneliness among homebound older adults, resulting in negative outcomes like cognitive decline, depression, heart disease, and reduced life expectancy. This underscores the need for more home and community-based support services in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and other denominations. My research also indicates that isolation decreases purpose and social engagement in seniors, impacting their self-esteem and overall well-being.

In my doctoral project, "Homebound Senior Adults" refers to those confined to their homes due to health or other physical limitations, yet remain mentally alert. These

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[1] Claire K. Ankuda, et al., "Association of the COVID-19 Pandemic With the Prevalence of Homebound Older Adults in the United States, 2011-2020," *JAMA Intern Med.* 181, no. 12 (Dec. 1, 2021): 1658–1660, doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2021.4456.

individuals risk being overlooked or undervalued, which can lead to missed opportunities for both them and their church. Often, after becoming homebound, many senior citizens lose their motivation to stay active in church life. As a result, seniors miss opportunities to share their God-given talents, and their church misses out on the benefits of learning from these Homebound Seniors' experiences.

Dr. Richard Gentzier, Jr., warns the church about missed opportunities with our seniors:

> Perhaps the most disconcerting reality about our graying congregations is not that our population is aging but that many churches have done virtually nothing, or, at best, very little, to understand or to prepare for this change in age demographics. With growing numbers of older adults in our pews, congregations have an opportunity to be blessed by the gifts, prayers, presence, service, and witness for their older members. A church for all ages is a multigenerational congregation committed to creating the conditions of life able to fulfill the great potential that older people still have. The church needs to understand that this is an age of opportunity and that the church must begin to take seriously the spiritual needs of older adults and help them grow in Christian maturity. The challenges and transitions people experience as they grow older should not be overlooked or undervalued by the church.[2]

This project aims to motivate Homebound Seniors, as well as their home congregations, to find ways to encourage them to remain engaged in the ministries of their local congregations. It also seeks to encourage Homebound Adults to learn new ministry skills and local congregations to develop new ministries for these congregants. If the leadership of The St. Louis Berean Seventh-day Adventist Church intentionally provides discipleship opportunities for their Homebound Older Adults, then these Homebound Seniors will move from isolation to integration into their church life.

Despite the biblical emphasis, the Seventh-day Adventist Church faces a growing crisis. At the Berean Seventh-day Adventist Church, my project has shown that many

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[2] Richard H. Gentzier, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2018), 27.

Senior Adults find themselves increasingly isolated and disconnected from meaningful ministry. Research for my doctoral project on Homebound Individuals reveals that this disconnection creates a triple loss: seniors lose their sense of purpose and loss of divine calling, while our communities lose the irreplaceable wisdom, experience, and spiritual maturity that these individuals offer.

Throughout scripture, we see a pattern of Senior Adults playing crucial roles in salvation history. Consider Moses, being called to lead the Israelites to freedom, not in his prime but in his senior years. Remember Zechariah and Elizabeth, being chosen to become first- time parents to John the Baptist, in their older age (Lk. 1). Throughout this project, it became apparent that these were not afterthoughts in God's plan. I find that these are intentional demonstrations of how spiritual authority, wisdom, and purpose increase rather than diminish with one's age. Imagine the transformation that would take place in the St. Louis Berean Seventh-day Adventist Church if they were to fully embrace the practice of Senior Adults mentoring younger believers, and these Senior Adults sharing the wisdom that they have gained through decades of walking with God. My project demonstrates how Homebound Seniors, connected through technology and personal visits, are still able to contribute their spiritual gifts and prayers. My goal is to provide evidence for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to consider the spiritual depth added to our worship, teaching, and community life when all generations serve together and we create communities where faith is transmitted naturally across generations, where no one is forgotten or undervalued, and where the full spectrum of God's design for God's church is displayed.

Methodology

The methodology used to evaluate this project was a mixture of methods that included interviews, visits, administering pre- and post-ministry questionnaires, and the participants were required to study the Bible with another senior. The goal of the project was to bridge the gap to access and support Homebound Seniors' involvement at the St. Louis Berean Seventh-day Adventist Church. To move from a biblical understanding to a practical implementation of the value Homebound Senior Adults can bring to the church, I conducted a thorough assessment of how current structures hinder Senior Adult engagement, particularly for the Homebound. Interviews with Homebound Seniors were used to capture participants' living experiences. Home visitations were observation protocols. Pre-and post-ministry questionnaires measured spiritual well-being and connection were used, as well as participant observation during Bible Study sessions, and leadership assessments through guided Bible study facilitation by the seniors themselves were used to develop intentional pathways for seniors to share their wisdom through mentoring relationships. These methods also created accessible participation options that accommodated physical limitations while still providing meaningful contribution opportunities.

The hope is that the St. Louis Berean Seventh-day Adventist Church would establish regular intergenerational gatherings specifically designed for wisdom transfer and conduct training for leadership and congregations to value and actively seek the wisdom of senior members to better recognize that God still speaks powerfully through Homebound Seniors.

In my project, I implemented information gathered from the St. Louis Berean Seventh-day Adventist Church's Homebound Senior Adults. However, it is vital that I point out a few challenges faced as the project began. First, I was transferred to another congregation during the second year of my United Theological Seminary's Doctoral Program. I am grateful that I was granted permission to continue to use my former congregation for this doctoral project. The crisis with Homebound Seniors being unengaged in their local congregations affects numerous churches across denominational lines. Another challenge that I faced was that those whom I had initially identified as participants in the project passed away before I reached the point of implementation. This caused me emotional distress because of their loss, but I also questioned how I would find others to assist in the completion of this project. A third challenge was that I identified the Homebound Senior Adults, but I was only able to include half in the project implementation.

After identifying the new group of participants, I set a date to go to St. Louis and meet with the focus group in person to launch the project. During this meeting, I explained in detail how they would be assisting in the project's completion. We would meet weekly on Sunday afternoons, for an hour to an hour and a half over the phone. Because of scheduling issues, we would need to be flexible. The reason that we met over the phone is that they did not have access to Webex. I also used a senior pastoral assistant from the St. Louis Berean Church to serve as my contextual associate. In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, these assistants are known as Church Elders. Elder Judy Lane, consented to serve in this role. She assisted in identifying participants, contacting them to remind them of our scheduled meeting times, and provided support as needed.

Steps in the Process

Following the in-person information session, each member of the focus group signed the required consent form. Each participant completed a pre-survey questionnaire. The survey provided background demographics for each participant. The focus group was made up of three women and two men. A complete list of the pre-questionnaires and post questionnaires have been included in Appendix (B).

All members of the focus group participated in a five-week Bible study, which I created and entitled "Seasoned Seniors Bible Study." I served as the facilitator for each session. This five-week Bible study identified older adults from the Bible who made major contributions to salvation history in their later years of life. Another critical part of this process was that after I had led the participants through the Bible Study, they were to serve as a facilitator of the "Seasoned Seniors Bible Study Lessons" with another Senior Adult. Not only did I lead them through the Bible study, but I also mentored them on how to lead the Bible study session. By leading out in the Bible study, they experienced a practicum in discipleship activity again or for some very first time.

At the conclusion of the "Seasoned Senior Bible Study," they completed a post-questionnaire. This final questionnaire was intended to determine whether this Bible study activity was beneficial in reminding Homebound Seniors that they have talents to offer to the ministries of the church. It verified whether the participants had identified a ministry of interest to join or rejoin at the St. Louis Berean Seventh-day Adventist Church.

A mixture of methods was used to achieve the project. We employed questionnaires, Bible studies, group discussions, and interviews. As mentioned

previously, these “Senior Seasoned Bible Studies” were created to identify older adults from the Bible who made significant contributions in their later years. These Bible studies were developed to encourage the participants that just because they are in the final years of their lives, it does not mean that they are incapable of making a meaningful contribution to their community of believers. One’s age does not restrict God from being able to use them in meaningful ways. God used seniors throughout biblical times, and He is also using them today.

Next, Homebound Seniors were encouraged to not only take part in the Bible studies, but to identify another senior to go through the Bible lessons with. The project participants were responsible for leading their own study. They were granted the freedom to choose a Bible study partner from within or outside the church. But if it was at all possible, they were encouraged to consider studying with someone who was a Homebound Adult. This assignment was an instrument to aid the Homebound Senior Adult they chose to work with in simulating the discipleship activity of conducting personal bible studies. No matter what ages, through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we can all rightly divide the word of truth with someone else (2 Tm. 2:15).

In our final session together, the post-questionnaire was completed. After this session, I personally met with each group member to discuss the personal benefit of the Bible study. I also followed up with them concerning their assignment to identify a ministry to become actively involved in and learned whether they were successful in achieving this goal.

Implementation

This six-week project began on September 29, 2024, and the final session was held on November 10, 2024. Each session was scheduled to begin at noon Central Time on Sunday afternoons. There were several occasions when we were required to adjust our schedules because of emergencies that arose. I was transferred to a different pastoral assignment during my doctoral project. This presented challenges, but I was permitted to use my former place of ministry to complete the project. To address the issue of distance, I drove from Columbus, Ohio, to St. Louis, Missouri, for our very first session.

How were the members of the focus group selected? We began by identifying all the homebound members of the St. Louis Berean Church. My contextual associate assisted me with this process. Next, we identified which members would identify with being Homebound Seniors. Then, we singled out which ones would possibly be able to take part in this project. We recognized that some members would have a difficult time being involved because of health conditions. Others would find it challenging to participate because of their role as a health care provider for a loved one. Thirdly, I personally called and asked these saints if they would be willing to assist in my doctoral project. During our conversations, I explained to the Homebound Senior Adults what the goals of my project were, how they could be of assistance, and inquired if they would be willing to take part in the project. Ten individuals were identified to take part in this project, but only six people consented to participate. Of the six who consented, only five were able to follow through with their commitment. This focus group was made up of two men and three women. Each of the contributors was aged seventy or older. For confidentiality, each member of the group was assigned a number to identify them. I am

the only one who knows which number was assigned to each group participant. Below is a brief description of each participant.

Number One

Participant One was female, a college graduate with a bachelor's and master's degree. She was a single widow, retired, and had served in numerous ways in the church. She continues to, wants to serve with the Finance Committee.

Number Two

Participant Two was female and completed some college. She was divorced, retired, and did not feel that she would have something to contribute to the church ministries.

Number Three

Participant Three was male, had completed some college, and was divorced. He was semi-retired and wanted to serve on the Building and Site Committee.

Number Four

Participant Number Four was male, a high school graduate, married, and retired. He wanted to serve those who are sick and shut in.

Number Five

Participant Number Five was female and a high school graduate. She was married, retired, and wanted to serve with the sick and shut-in, as well as on the Outreach Team.

Weekly Bible Study Format

Each session began with a short prayer and welcome. Next, we inquired whether there were any special concerns for which the members needed our group to intercede. Thirdly, we spent time on intercessory prayers. Fourthly, we reviewed and discussed "the Seasoned Senior Bible Study Lesson Guide assigned for that day. Finally, we closed our session by sharing any pertinent announcements and with a closing prayer.

Week One-September 29, 2024

This was our very first meeting. This meeting was held in person at the St. Louis Berean Seventh-day Adventist Church on the corner of Page and Union Blvd. We met in the church's parish hall. At this initial gathering, I explained to our group what would be taking place during the next five weeks. Next, I read to them the Consent Form and allowed each of them to ask any questions that they might have. After each participant signed the Consent Form, my contextual associate assisted me in collecting them. Thirdly, we participated in our season of prayer. Fourthly, we passed out the first Bible Study Guide-"John the Beloved." The study clearly identified who John the Beloved was. Then we discussed what John was facing as an older adult. This question opened the door for us to discuss modern-day challenges that our Homebound Seniors were facing. The

fourth question asked whether John was productive in his later years and if so, how. The group pointed out that even though John was homebound on a Patmos'-prison colony, he was able to share the Revelation of Jesus Christ with saints from other parts of the world. We closed our study by challenging them to identify ways that they had shared their talents from their home.

Some may question why I chose to highlight "John the Beloved" in a Bible study concerning Homebound seniors? John unjust imprisonment is an example of being isolated for a reason other than one's own health. Early in my project, I pointed out that there are other reasons why individuals are homebound, like transportation issues. In John's case, he has been confined because of his faith in Jesus Christ. John contributed the book of Revelation while he was homebound or confined.

Week Two: October 6, 2024

In our second meeting, we again welcomed our group members and spent time in prayer. Our Bible Study Guide was entitled "David: A Man After God's Own Heart." In my biblical formation chapter, I pointed out that scholars are divided on whether David penned Psalm Seventy and Seventy-One. From my research have side with those who have assigned these chapters to authorship. We learned that, like those in our group, David was multi-gifted: In 1 Samuel 16:11, he was a shepherd; 1 Samuel 16:18, He was a musician; in 1 Samuel 17:45-49-he was a warrior; and 1 Samuel 16:12-13, he was a king. We also discussed that aging does not exempt one from facing challenges. The group pointed out that in his later years, David had goals that he could not achieve. David had to resolve to be at peace, that he would not be the one who would build the temple. God

assured him that his son Solomon would fulfil his vision of constructing the temple. Yet, David contributed to gathering supplies and making this dream become a reality in new ways.

David also faced some undisclosed health events in the First Book of Kings, Chapter One. This health crisis resulted in him struggling to stay warm. Soon, he would have to resign from his position as Israel's Chief of State and place his son on the throne. From my biblical formation research, Psalm Chapter Seventy-One, I was able to identify other issues from David's later years. In Psalms 71:4, and 10-11, David was petitioning God to deliver him from his enemies. In Psalms 71:9 and 18, David was pleading for God to remember him in his older age. David struggled with the fear of loneliness and social isolation. Many of our modern-day seniors are struggling with loneliness and feelings of being disconnected, especially those who are homebound. "Loneliness is an epidemic in the United States."[3]

We also analyzed how David faced his enemies and challenges in Psalms Chapter Seventy-One. In verses five and twenty, he embraced the promises of God. Also, David was an optimist. He refused to believe that his work was complete. In verse eighteen, he committed to sharing God's strength and power with another generation. David's experience reaffirms that aging does not mean that one has reached the end of meaningfully contributing to society. David journaled the twenty-two verses of Psalms Chapter Seventy-One. David continued to pen additional Psalms. David mentored his son Solomon, on how to be a king after God's own heart.

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[3] Vivck Murthy, "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation 2023: The U. S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community" (Washington, D.C.: Office of The U. S. Surgeon General, May 2023), 4, https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf.

Week Three: October 13, 2024

The third session of the project was rescheduled because of a funeral. After our welcome and intercessory prayer, we reviewed our Bible Study Guide on "Zacharias and Elisabeth." We first reviewed biographical information about this couple. They were a pastoral couple, and they were related to Mary, the future mother of Jesus. Like many couples in the Bible, they also struggled with fertility issues. This issue led to other challenges: the reproach from being a woman and childless, there was the disappointment of not being the parents of the Messiah, and who would care for them, a childless couple, in their final years?

Although our focus group members did not have fertility issues, several of them had experience losing a child to death. We spent time discussing ways that they could use what they had learned, to assist someone else who was going through similar experiences. The two parents who lost children lost them after they had become seniors. According to Luke 1:13-17, God was not only heard their prayers concerning these problems, but He sent an angel to respond to their request.

Although they would not give birth to the Messiah, they would be entrusted to groom and raise him who would prepare the way for the Messiah's ministry. John the Baptist would turn many to the Lord (Lk. 1:16-17). He reminded people how to love as God loves (Lk. 3:7-20). He bore witness to the Light (Jn. 1:6-8). We discussed how God is using seniors today and keeping His promises to them.

Week Four: October 20, 2024

Session four was also rescheduled because of a funeral. After our welcome and season of prayer, we reviewed "The Woman at Zarephath." We had to again acknowledge the reality that aging does not reduce one's challenges. According to 1 Kings 17:7-16, this woman was enduring numerous difficulties. She was a woman, a widow, a single parent, enduring famine, her resources had dried up and she belonged to heathen nation. We discussed that, like the woman who embraced the promises of God, we must follow her example. She honored the prophet's request, and God provided her household with daily bread.

Sometimes our greatest challenges come late in life. Abraham was tested with sacrificing his son Issac. This woman, in a similar way was tested again. Her son experienced a sudden health emergency and passed away. Yet, she called for the prophet. The grieving mother gave the child to the prophet. He took the child. He lay on the child. He prayed for the child. God revived the child. The mother testified that she knew that God's word was in the prophet's mouth and that Elijah was a prophet of the Lord. We talked about how the woman's faith must have been a witness in the community. The group was challenged to look at a difficulty that they were presently facing and consider how they could use it to help someone else.

Week Five: October 28, 2024

The fifth session was rescheduled to 7:00 p.m. because of a funeral. Once again, we welcomed our group and spent time in a season of prayer. Our final seasoned Bible Study was entitled "Anna and Simeon." Lk. 2:25-26 describes this senior citizen as just

and devout, waiting for the birth of Christ and full of the Holy Spirit. We discussed the ways that God communicates to us: scriptures, sermons, dreams, visions, prophets, people, and direct communication. We shared personal testimonies of God speaking to us. God promises Simeon that he will see death before he sees the Promised Messiah. One day the Spirit of God leads Simeon to the Temple. His faithfulness is rewarded, and he sees the Messiah. He also shares the mission of the Messiah with the parents.

The next character in the story was Anna. She was a prophetess and well up in age. Anna spent her time at the temple, devoted to fasting and praying. She arrived at the temple in time to hear Simeon identify the Messiah. Anna praised God and told everyone about the Messiah's arrival. We talked about how God called these two prophets at the end of their lives to announce the greatest message that could ever be told. They proclaimed the Good News of the coming king's arrival. This message was not entrusted to the most educated or the most highly respected individuals. It was given to the humble senior citizens. God is still willing to use Homebound Senior Adults today.

Week Six: November 10, 2024

Session six was rescheduled to 7:00 p.m., because I was traveling to Atlanta, Georgia, for my mid-term intensive. This session was held to complete the post-survey questionnaires, to share how to return the questionnaires to me, and to express my gratitude to each one of them for taking the time to participate in my project. During this final gathering, I followed up with each contributor to learn if they had identified and connected with a ministry at the St. Louis Berean Seventh-day Adventist Church. I followed us with each group members.

Three of my Foundation Chapters were utilized in the development of the Seasoned Senior Study Guides. First, I used the research from the Biblical Foundation Chapter to prepare the second Bible Study, which was entitled: "David: A Man After God's Own Heart." The study was based on Psalm Chapter Seventy-One. In this passage, King David identified one of the major challenges of aging, being separated or socially isolated. Most Homebound Seniors don't want to be socially isolated.

The Theological Foundation Chapter aided me in staying focused on a theology of ageing, that I had discovered during my research. These theological points are reflected throughout each of the Bible study series. Each study guide emphasized how God valued all individuals, no matter their sex, age, ethnic origin, or social status within the community. They demonstrated how being a senior is a blessing in God's Eyes, even though ageing is not viewed as a blessing to all humans. In each study we identified how each of the biblical characters were used by God, to make a significant contribution to their community.

The Interdisciplinary Foundation Chapter helped me to highlight the Activity Theory of Aging in at least two of the Bible Studies. The Activity Theory argues that seniors need to remain active to age well. By remaining active, they benefit not only themselves, but their community.[4] I believe that David illustrates this in Psalms 71:9 and 18 when he pleads for God not to forget him in his old age, and his promise to share the knowledge of Him with his generation. He needed to maintain his activeness. Also, Anna and Simeon benefited from their daily activities at the temple. This pair prayed and fasted

[4] Steve Barkan, "Sociology: Understanding and Changing the Social World." in *Biological and Psychological Aspects of Aging* (Minneapolis, MN: LibreTexts, 2010), Chapter 12.5.

daily to see the Messiah, in their lifetime. They both were actively looking for and waiting for the arrival of their Lord. During the last segment of his life, Zacharias was still actively performing his priestly duties, even though he was "stricken in years" (Lk. 1:7).

Psalms 92:12-14, from the New Living Translation, was chosen as our theme passage of scripture for the Bible study: "But the Godly will flourish like palm trees and grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon. For they are transplanted to the Lord's own house. They flourish in the courts of our God. Even in old age they will still produce fruit; they will remain vital and green." Weekly, our Bible study began with the repetition of this passage**,** which promised that saint would be productive in their old age. Upon completion of The Bible Studies, I personally interviewed the members of the focus group.

Summary of Learning

The foundation for this project was the recognition that there is a segment of our congregations and community that is being underutilized or even ignored. It appears that the saying is true "Out of sight, out of mind." When Senior Adults become restricted to their homes or a facility, there is a danger of forgetting about them. Throughout this doctoral journey, I have been mindful of a conversation with one of my former members, the late Sister R. She was a Homebound Senior. Earlier in this project, I mentioned how she called me one day and made a request of her pastor. She asked me to ask the members of the St. Louis Berean Seventh-day Adventist Church, to call and check on her. Her request was humbling. Although I would stop by and visit with her from time to

time, it was not enough. She needed additional support from the other members of her church family.

There is also a tendency to assume that Homebound Senior Adults are no longer able to contribute to the mission of their church. Yet, Sister R. is a prime example of a Homebound Senior who was doing her part to support the ministries of her church. During the four years that I was privileged to serve as her pastor, there was never a time when I sent out a request by telephone concerning a need that Sister R. did not quickly respond to it. For example, when there was a need to assist in the burial of a member, Sister R. was the first person to respond. She instructed me to stop by her home and pick up a check. On another occasion Sister R. invited me to stop by to pick up supplies for hurricane survivors, whom we were assisting in Houston, Texas. This Homebound Senior demonstrated with her actions what it means to be a neighbor.

Yet, Homebound Seniors are being forgotten about daily. The Church is not neglecting them intentionally. I believe the Church means well, but the reality is that they are being ignored.

There are several things that I learned and that were reaffirmed through this project. I assumed that everyone who is homebound felt disconnected from the Church. Participant Two is not attending church as often as she once did. Even so, in our personal interview, I was surprised to hear she did not feel isolated from her church family. She lives a distance from her church, but she has access to technology, which has allowed her to stay connected to her St. Louis Berean Church Family. Weekly, she watches Berean's Seventh-day Sabbath Worship Service as well as several other churches. On Wednesday evenings, she participates in the Midweek Prayer Service by telephone. She expressed to

me that she was satisfied with the way that things were going. But I did notice that she took steps to become more active. She accepted my suggestion to join a daily prayer group that meets on the telephone, composed of senior saints. Sadly, she did not remain with the group. I sense that she was looking for members of the group to reach out to her to assist her in staying connected. Because this did not happen, she became discouraged and stepped away.

On another occasion, she also attempted to make plan for transportation with a fellow church member to attend events at church, but they did not follow up with her. This also seemed to cause her to become disillusioned. On another occasion she expressed that several members had promised that they would call and check on her. Once again, they did not follow up on their promises. So, she has chosen to attach herself to the individual who assisted her in joining her Church initially. They have their own ministry of study, The Word of God together. This indicates to me that she is experiencing loneliness and isolation from her congregation, but she has chosen to cope with it in her own way.

I mentioned earlier that a part of this project's requirements was that the participants were to participate in a weekly Bible Study Group. They would join me in studying the Seasoned Senior Bible Studies. These students were to identify an individual to study the lessons with. This was a discipleship activity. The members expressed their appreciation for participating in the Bible Study Group.

Quickly, Participant Two identified someone to be her partner in studying the Bible lessons with. The person she chose to study with was the neighbor who was instrumental in leading her into membership at the St. Louis Berean Seventh-day

Adventist Church. In just a few years, their roles had now reversed. The disciple was now doing the discipling. Her actions revealed very clearly that she was not only willing but able to contribute to the ministries of the Berean Seventh-day Adventist Church. After her mentor consented to participating in the Bible Studies, the participant called me back. I could hear in her voice how excited she was that she was able to give back to her former Bible instructor.

Their Bible study time helped The Homebound Senior to build her confidence in studying the Bible and feel more comfortable reading the Word of God. It also strengthened her reading skills. Although her former instructor's health had declined, the student had now assumed the role of Bible instructor. She was now the one who was leading the study. Is this not what Christ called us to do, in Matthew 28:18-20? As His followers, we have been commissioned to call others to discipleship. We are to assist others in their maturing as His disciples. If we are not growing, then we are dying.

Participant One shared how she appreciated the Bible studies. At her age, she was able to learn something new from the group discussion. This reinforced the reality that Homebound Seniors are not content where they are. They are willing to grow and learn brand new things.

Thirdly, I learned that even though the Homebound Seniors were encouraged to identify ministries and get involved in them, several of them had not by the time my research project had concluded. Several months later, I learned that Participant One was still actively involved and leading a Senior Prayer Ministry. Although she is still involved, she expressed that, "Once you are unable to do what you used to, it is as if you don't exist." She went on to express that what helps her not to become discouraged is that

she recalls, “you have to remember who you are working for. You are not working for the church. It is God and not for the people.” She also shared that she is determined to continue to do what she can for as long as she can clean, drive, and more. This attitude reaffirms the Activity Theology, which assists in helping older adults age successfully.

Participant Two, who had become the Bible instructor, had chosen not to be involved in any additional ministries. She had attempted to reach out to several church members about getting involved, but they failed to follow up with her. This led her to become discouraged and to remain in the Bible study that she was already in.

Participant Three identified a ministry to get involved with. She requested a list of those who were sick and homebound, but she has not yet received the list. She is still willing to work with them. I fear that if she does not receive the information that she has requested, she will also become discouraged and lose her interest in serving in this way.

Participant Five, attended the Bible studies, as well as studied them with another senior. He also shared his willingness to be involved in the ministries of the church. Like three of the other group members, he had not gotten involved in a new ministry at church. He expressed that “it takes the church to want you to be apart.” He is not motivated to investigate or identify a ministry because he does not feel that the church needs him anymore. Although it is not disclosed in the project, Participant Five has found himself a way to get involved. Through the power of God, he checks on those who are homebound. At times, he will find the strength to visit and encourage them.

The project confirmed that Homebound Senior Adults have gifts to share. They want to share the God-given gifts that they have been entrusted with. They want to feel needed. The Church has a golden opportunity to utilize the resources that are found in its

Homebound Seniors. What did not work out well in my project? What did not work well in my project is that four of the five group members still are not involved in the ministries of the church. Two are unofficially ministering on their own.

Suggestions

When I reviewed the data I received from these five participants, my conclusions led me to the following suggestions. The Berean Seventh-day Adventist Church leadership should intentionally invest in a Senior Ministry Coordinator. The pastor cannot do all of the encouraging. Seniors and Homebound Seniors need someone to assist them in identifying ministries to take part in, support them in developing new ministries, and someone to cheer them on in becoming more active in discipleship activities. In other words, they need someone to advocate for them. This idea is illustrated in the experience of Mrs. Mack.

The late Mrs. Frances Jones Mack was unexpectedly struck with an ailment, which resulted in her being hospitalized. While she was convalescing in the hospital, Mother Mack experienced several occurrences of medical neglect. For example, one evening, it took a long period of time before she was able to get the attention of the nursing staff when she needed assistance to go to the restroom.

As a registered nurse and patient, she was convinced that hospital patients need guidance in preparing for their hospital visits. This prompted her to have a conversation with her son, Bishop Sir Walter Mack, Jr. During their discussion, Bishop Mack proceeded to encourage his mother to pen a book to address this issue. It resulted in Mrs. Mack composing, Before You Go to the Hospital. Although Mother Mack was

homebound, she was willing and able to be of service to others who were in need. Her ordeal resulted in the development of a written guide for those who are preparing for admission into a medical facility.

One of the observations that Mother Mack made resonated with the findings in my project. She proposed that those who are hospitalized need advocates. These advocates provide safety, are the voice for the patient, serve as coaches, look for errors, and rally resources and prayer warriors on behalf of those who are ailing.[5]

Just like those who are confined to medical care facilities need someone to advocate for them, so Homebound Senior Adults need someone with a heart for them to be their coach in their communities of faith. It takes a special individual to work with our senior population. They can be challenging to work with. Seniors have their own way of doing things, and it can be difficult for them to make the adjustment to try something new. If I did this project again, I would utilize the counsel of one of my Professional Associates. He advised me to employ a Spiritual Gifts Assessment Program to assist the Homebound Seniors in identifying their gifts at this stage in their lives. I mentioned in the project that when seniors are no longer able to do what they used to do, they must be retooled or trained in another area of ministry. We see this happen when individuals lose their jobs. There are programs in our communities that provide opportunities for these unemployed individuals to be trained in another form of employment.

The advocates can serve not only as encouragers for the senior population, but they can also be utilized as educators. Senior ministry leaders can assist in educating their local parishioners and leaders concerning the specific needs of their homebound

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[5] Frances Jones Mack, *Before You Go to the Hospital* (Winston-Salem, NC: Smack Publishing, 2021), 32-34.

congregants. After sixty or seventy years of church attendance, there is a feeling of loss or even of abandonment on the part of the elderly who can no longer attend worship.[6] These emotions are probably not on some members' radar. There may even be those who feel that Homebound Senior Adults are probably tired and content to do nothing.

Previously, I mentioned the narrative of Sister R. She did her part to support the ministries of the church. But she still felt lonely and isolated from her church family. She refused to suffer in silence any longer. This Homebound felt comfortable enough to bring her need to my attention. Suddenly, I was placed in the role of serving as her advocate. When I met with my leadership team, I shared Sister R.'s concern and made a special appeal that we would intentionally contact her. I pray that my advocating for her made a difference in her circumstances. Personally, her request made me more sensitive to the plight of our homebound older membership.

Finally, this project reminded me of how transitory a person's health is. Some well-meaning saints consented to being involved in my project, but their health issues made it problematic. One saint was among the first to commit to assisting me, but her chronic illness made her unavailable. Another couple who started with us struggled to consistently participate in our weekly meetings because of the health dilemma that one of the spouses was experiencing. Their health varied by the week. These challenges made it difficult for them to consistently be involved in the project. Although Homebound Senior Adults desire to be engaged in the ministries of the local congregation, there will come a time when they will no longer be able to physically contribute their talents anymore. As

[6] Timothy M. Farabaugh, *Ministry To and With the Elderly* (Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2005), 5.

challenging as that is, Homebound Seniors and our community will have to come to terms with that reality.

Conclusion

Pastor Hezekiah Walker wrote a moving song, entitled "I Need You To Survive."

> I need you, you need me, We're all a part of God's body, Stand with me, agree with me.
>
> We're all a part of God's body. It is his will, that every need be supplied. You are important to me, I need you to survive, You are important to me, I need you to survive.[7]

These words remind us of just how interdependent humanity is upon one another. We need each other to survive on this planet. The utilization of all our members' gifts would transform our neighborhoods and churches.

I agree with Dr. Richard H. Gentzier, Jr.'s statement that:

> Many congregations with large numbers of older people can and do experience congregational vitality. The aging stereotypes of decline, dementia, and dependence must be replaced with empowering values of independence, activity, well-being, and service. Replacing stereotypes and ageist attitudes with empowering values can help transform graying congregations into vital congregations. Church leaders in vital congregations know that people of all ages are called to be faithful witnesses of God's love. Older adults, no less than people of other ages, who are equipped and empowered for ministry can help nurture congregational transformation.[8]

This doctoral project has renewed my appreciation for the older members of our congregations and their love for the Lord. It has reaffirmed how important their gifts and talents are to the life and vitality of the Church's Mission. By working together, we can be a blessing to one another. It has been so encouraging to see how Homebound Senior

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[7] "I Need You To Survive," track 12 on Hezekiah Walker and the Love Fellowship Choir, A Family Affair II-Live At Radio City Music Hall, Sony Legacy, 2002, compact disc.

[8] Gentzier, *An Age of Opportunity,* 86.

Adults are still discovering ways to minister with their own challenges and those of not being as connected to the church as they would like. We can all learn from their attitude of being persistent.

Value of the Project for Future Work

In His sermon on the mount, Jesus challenged his audience to treat others as they would want to be treated (Matt. 7:12). People are living longer than they have ever lived before. There are three projects that I envision implementing upon the completion of this doctoral project. First, through the encouragement of Dr. Sir Walter Mack, Jr., I intend to use the information from this project to pen a non-academic book. It will be entitled, "Don't Bury Me Yet!" The purpose of the book would be to encourage our Senior Adults, especially our Homebound Seniors, to ensure that their best days of giving back are still ahead of them. The book would also challenge the Church to look for ways to utilize these valuable resources in its local congregations.

Next, I would like to develop a series of seminars to awaken the church and community to the challenges that are affecting our Homebound Senior Adults. Our faith communities need not only to be informed of the issues that their congregants are facing but also be willing to be problem solvers. The church has an opportunity to illustrate the benefits of keeping its Homebound Senior Adults involved in the mission of the church.

Thirdly, I would like to update the "Seasoned Senior Bible Studies." I would like to update the series to include additional narratives of older adults from the Bible and their discipleship experiences. Presently, there are five lessons, but I would like to create an additional five studies. One of the participants in my project asked if there were

additional lessons. The study of other people's journeys could reinforce that the aging process is not necessarily a smooth road to travel, yet one can still be of service through the experience.

Nearly three years ago, one of my hardest-working members disclosed that he was facing his fifth bout with cancer. Each time I visited him, my deacon shared a couple of things with me. He shared his tenacious faith in God to heal him as He had done during his previous four diagnoses. He would also request an update on other church members who were going through their own health challenges. But he was not content to merely ask about them. From his hospital bed, he would use his cell phone and check on how they were progressing. His ministering to others who were homebound must have been a source of encouragement to those who were ailing.

During what would turn out to be our final visit together, I noticed that my deacon, who was confined to a nursing home, was very excited. He shared that a few days after he was admitted to the skilled nursing facility, he learned that his cousin through marriage, whom he had never met before, was also a resident in the same building. As he shared the story, his cousin rolled her wheelchair into the room. He proceeded to introduce us to one another. Then he invited her to visit our church. This critically ill, Homebound Senior was so thrilled to invite his cousin to worship at his church. Guess what? Through the assistance of our saints, my deacon's cousin was able to take him up on the invitation and visit our church. Several months later, she officially became a member of our congregation. Our deacon passed away a few months later and never returned to church. But he entrusted his cousin to our care, where she remained a member until she passed away during the summer of 2025. My deacon was a faithful

witness even unto death. Homebound Seniors can remain connected to their church through discipleship opportunities and make a difference in others' lives. This dying deacon introduced his new family member to our congregation, who became her new extended family. The deacon passed away before learning of the difference that he had made in his cousin's life. When Jesus Christ comes to collect the Redeemed of the Lord, my deacon will know the difference that he fostered in his cousin's life.

Anna Eleanor Roosevelt was the wife of the thirty-second president of the United States. After her husband's untimely death, the former First Lady remained active in numerous political and social causes. Yet one of this strong woman's greatest fears was that she would grow old and no longer be useful. Mrs. Roosevelt needed to be needed.[9] Homebound Seniors, in our local community of believers, needed to be needed. May our churches intentionally do all that they can to recognize the need to support our Homebound Seniors in re-engaging in ministry and patiently provide opportunities for them to minister. The church, the community, and the Homebound Senior Adult can all experience mutual benefits from collaborating in ministry.

[9] PBS America, "The Roosevelts: An Intimate History-A Strong and Active Faith," PBS America, www.pbs.org>kenburns>the-roosevelts>astrongandactivefaith, 111 minutes, 2014.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

United Theological Seminary
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Investigator Name: Charles Ray Osborne, III.
Contact Information: crosborne1@united.edu

Introduction: I am a doctoral student at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio.

Purpose: I am conducting a study to aid home bound seniors to be more involved in the ministries of the church. Moving Homebound Seniors from isolation to integration through discipleship opportunities.

Requirements for Participation: You are invited because you are a homebound senior who are members of The St. Louis Berean Seventh-day Adventist Church who are mentally alert.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to: attend 6 sessions held on Sunday's at 12:30pm-1:30pm. Participants will attend the initial session in-person (St. Louis Berean Church's Fellowship Hall) and due to mobility and technological barriers five (5) sessions will be held via the Church's conference call Line. Participants will be courteous to others as well as adhere to confidentiality of participants, complete pre and post questionnaires, voluntarily share life experiences as well as participate in Bible Studies and identify another senior to review the Bible Study's with others.

Human Subject participation:
All the participants must have consented to be in the study, and participants must be protected and treated fairly throughout the study. For example, they must be homebound, unable to leave their home alone, and over the age of 65 with cognitive understanding. Seniors who are women are over childbearing age, and considered a protected class due to their age and health concerns (i.e., vulnerable population) by the Federal Law.

Risks:
Homebound senior citizens who desire to be actively involved with their church face various risks, primarily stemming from social isolation and potential disconnect from the Church community. Immediate risk associated with being unable to attend in-person worship and/or social activities may include feelings associated with social isolation and loneliness have been linked to increased risk of health issues such as cognitive decline, depression, heart disease, and a shorter life expectancy which highlights the importance of developing and expanding home and community-based services to support this vulnerable population. Also, feelings of worthlessness and loss of purpose can negatively affect self-esteem and sense of purpose. In the event of accidental data disclosure, there may be legal, financial, social, or personal implications. In addition, I, the researcher, will abide by my state's mandatory reporting laws.

Benefits:
It is my hope that churches and communities will play a vital role in mitigating these risks by intentionally developing homebound ministries. This research should help churches implement programs such as home visitation, delivering communion, provide regular phone calls, offer support for caregivers, and create opportunities for connection. By proactively addressing challenges associated with homebound seniors, churches and communities can ensure that homebound senior citizens remain connected to their faith and feel valued members of their church family, despite their age and/or physical limitations.

Voluntariness:
Participation is voluntary and you do not have to lead Bible Study. You can also stop participating at any time. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your membership in the congregation or whatever else you think this study may have an impact upon. If something makes you feel uncomfortable in any way while you are in the study, please contact me directly in person, on the phone, or electronic communication. My contact information is at the top of this consent form. You can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions, and you will be able to withdraw from the process at any time.

Confidentiality:
I will be careful to keep your information confidential, and I will ask you and all the Bible Study participants to keep the discussion confidential as well. There is always a small risk of unwanted or accidental disclosure. The conversations and the Bible Study groups will be recorded and transcribed only with your permission. Any notes, recordings, or transcriptions will be kept private. I will be the only one with access to your information. The files will be encrypted, and password protected. You can decide whether you want your name to be used via Webex which will be used for virtual sessions. It is up to you to decide if you want to be on the camera at any time.

Summary:
If you have any questions about the research study, please contact me, Pastor Charles Ray Osborne, III, at (313)770-5520 or crosborne1@united.edu. Remember, this consent form along with the welcome letter must be signed and returned to me either in-person or by email no later than October ____, 2024. Many thanks for your interest and consideration of participating in this study.

Signature:
Signing this paper means that you have read this, or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

Signature of Person Agreeing to Participate in the Project/Study	Date Signed

APPENDIX B

PRE-SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Pre-Survey Questions

1) How old are you?

2) What is your ethnic background?

3) What is your sex?

4) What is your marital status?
    a. Married
    b. Divorce
    c. Single
    d. Single Widow or Widower

5) What is your educational level? Please circle all that apply!
    a. Elementary
    b. Junior High School
    c. High School
    d. Some College
    e. College Graduate
    f. Masters
    g. Doctorate

6) Did you grow up in the United States of America?

7) Which city did you grow up in?

8) Which city do you presently live in?

9) What is your present living condition?
    a. Alone
    b. With Spouse
    c. With Children
    d. With Family Members
    e. With Friends

10) How often do you attend church?
    a. Once a month
    b. Twice a month
    c. Three time a month
    d. A couple of times a quarter
    e. Seldom

11) Do you attend church virtually (online)?

12) Do you belong to the church that you attend?

13) How long have you belonged to this particular church?

14) Which ministries were you involved in when you were actively attending church?

15) How do you feel about being actively involved in the ministries of the church?

16) Do you feel that you have something to contribute to the ministries of the church?
    a. Yes
    b. No

17) In which ministries would you like to share in?

18) Are you willing to learn a new ministry?
    a. Yes
    b. No

19) Do you use digital devices?
    a. Mobile Phones
    b. Tablets
    c. Computers
    d. All The Above
    e. None Of The Above

20) Would you be willing to invest in these devices?
    a. Yes
    b. No

21) When did you acquire your first Mobile Phone?

22) Do you use the internet?
    a. Yes
    b. No

23) Do you have access to the internet?
    a. Yes
    b. No

24) Are you interested in having access to the internet?
    a. Yes
    b. No

25) Are you aware that there are government programs that provide reduced-rate or free internet to older adults?

APPENDIX C

POST-SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Post-Survey Questions

1. Were you able to get involved in a new or old ministry?

2. How do you feel after getting involved in this ministry?

3. If you learned a new ministry, how do you feel about learning something new?

4. How does being involved make you feel about the church?

APPENDIX D

SEASONED SAINT'S STUDY GUIDES 1-5

Seasoned Saint's Study Guide (1)

"John The Beloved"

(Text) Psalms 92:12-14 NLT
12 But the Godly will flourish like palm trees
and grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon.
13 For they are transplanted to the Lord's own house.
They flourish in the courts of our God.
14 Even in old age they will still produce fruit;
they will remain vital and green.

1)Who was John The Revelator?
-Revelation 1:9
-Matthew 17:1
-Mark 3:17
-John 20:2

2)What challenging situation did John find himself in during his later years?
-Revelation 1:9

3)Identify several of the challenging situations that older adults face during their later years?

4)Was John The Beloved productive in his later year? If so, how was he productive?
-Revelation 1:1-3, 11

(Season Saint Challenge) Identify 1 gift that you can share with someone else from home.

Seasoned Saint's Study Guide (2)
"David: A Man After God's Own Heart"

(Text) Psalms 92:12-14 NLT
12 But the Godly will flourish like palm trees
and grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon.
13 For they are transplanted to the Lord's own house.
They flourish in the courts of our God.
14 Even in old age they will still produce fruit;
they will remain vital and green.

1)Who was David?
-I Samuel 16:11-Shepherd
-I Samuel 16:18-Musician
-I Samuel 17:45-49-Warrior
-I Samuel 16:12, 13-King

2)What challenging situation does he find himself in the later part of his life?
Psalm 71:4, 10-11-Enemies
Psalm 71:9 and 18-Isolation From God

3)If you feel comfortable, please share some of the enemies that you are facing.

4)How does David face these enemies?
Psalm 71:1, 5 and 20-Claim the promises of God
Psalm 71:18- Commit to sharing with others, because he knows that his work is not complete yet.

5)How does David fulfil his promise to God, in Psalm 71:18?
-He journaled these 22 verses.
-He penned most of Psalms.
-He counseled his son Solomon.

(Season Saint Challenge) Identify a promise of God that you can embrace.

Seasoned Saint's Study Guide (3)
"Zacharias and Elisabeth"

(Text) Psalms 92:12-14 NLT
12 But the Godly will flourish like palm trees
and grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon.
13 For they are transplanted to the Lord's own house.
They flourish in the courts of our God.
14 Even in old age they will still produce fruit;
they will remain vital and green.

1)Who were Zacharias and Elizabeth?
-Luke 1:5-6

2)What challenging situation do they find themselves in during their later years?

3)Why would these challenges be so critical?
-Luke 1:6-7, 24-25 (childless and stricken in age)
-Who would care for them? What was Elizabeth's reproach?
-Luke 1:13 Many were hoping to the parents of the Messiah.

4)Have you lost a child or where unable to conceive? If you feel comfortable what helped you through the process? Is there some that you learned from this experience, that you could share to help someone else?

5)What was so significant about their prayers being answered?
-Luke 1:13-17

6)What additional struggle did Zacharias have? Vs. 18-20

7)How did God fulfill His promise to this couple?
-Luke 1:16-17
-Luke 3:7-20
-John 1:6-8
-John 1:19-34

Seasoned Saint's Study Guide (4)
"The Woman At Zarephath"

(Text) Psalms 92:12-14 NLT
12 But the Godly will flourish like palm trees
and grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon.
13 For they are transplanted to the Lord's own house.
They flourish in the courts of our God.
14 Even in old age they will still produce fruit;
they will remain vital and green.

1)Who was this woman? I Kings 17:7-16

2)What challenges did she face? I Kings 17:7-8
-She was a woman.
-She was a widow.
-She was a single parent.
-There was a famine.
-Her resources were apparently dried up.

3) What request was made of the prophet Elijah? What resources did she have? I Kings 17:10-12

4) What promise did the woman receive from being obedient to the word of God? I Kings 17:14-16

5) How do you think that she was a witness to Elijah and to the people of her community?

6) Did she face any additional challenges? If so, what were they? I Kings 17:17-24

7) Does being a season senior mean that there will be no challenges?

(Season Saint Challenge) Identify 1 challenge that you have faced and how you can use it to assist someone who is experiencing a similar challenge.

Seasoned Saint's Study Guide (5)
"Anna and Simeon"

(Text) Psalms 92:12-14 NLT
12 But the Godly will flourish like palm trees
and grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon.
13 For they are transplanted to the Lord's own house.
They flourish in the courts of our God.
14 Even in old age they will still produce fruit;
they will remain vital and green.

1)What stands out to you about the description of Simeon? Luke 2:25-26

2)Identify some of the ways that God communicates with humans.

3)Identify at least one of the ways that God has communicated with you personally.

4)How does Simeon respond to the promises of God? Luke 2:27-28

5)What message does God use Simeon to deliver to Jesus' parents? Luke 2:28-35

6)What stands out to you concerning Anna? Luke 2:36-38

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